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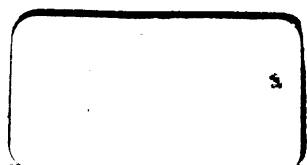
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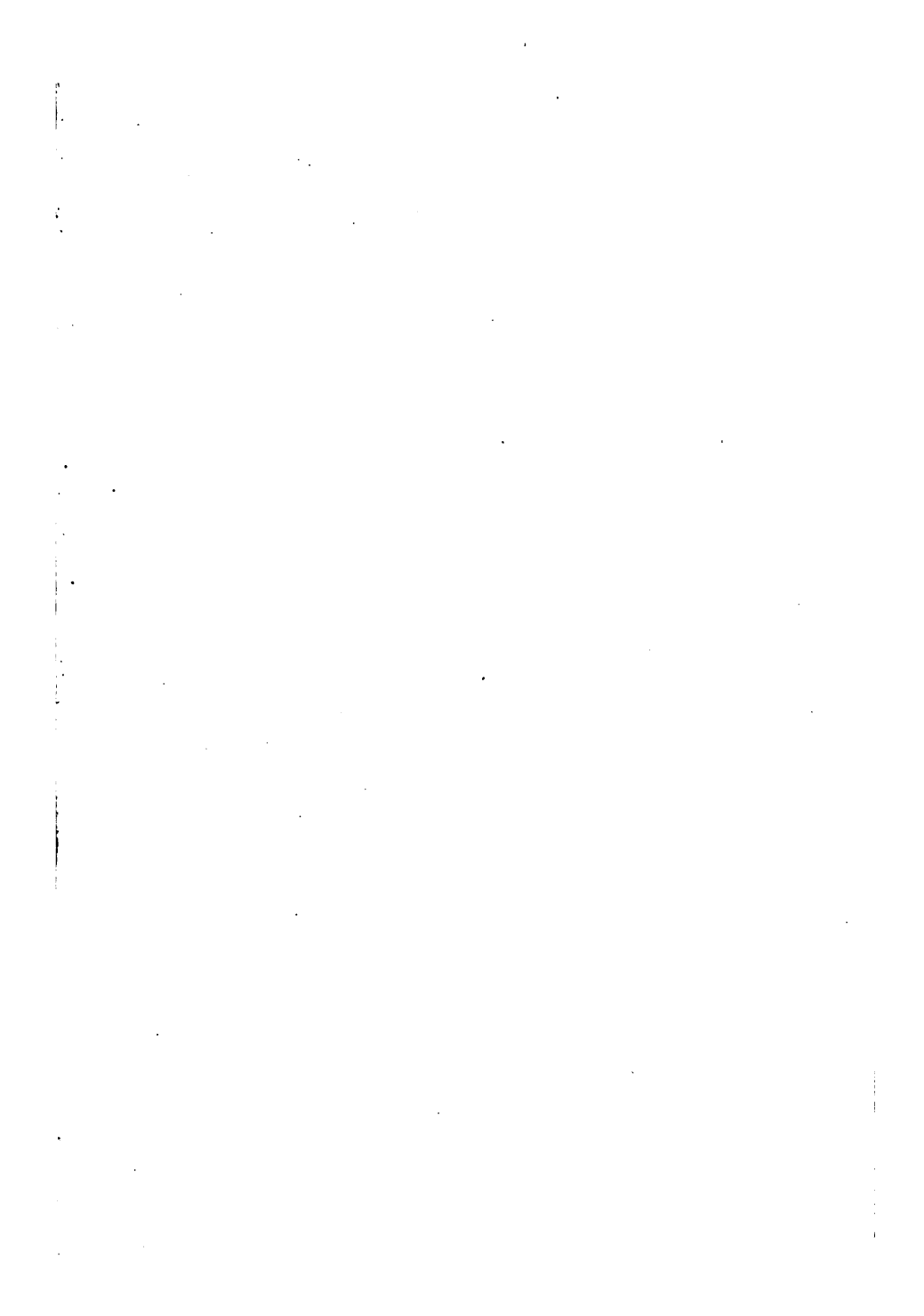
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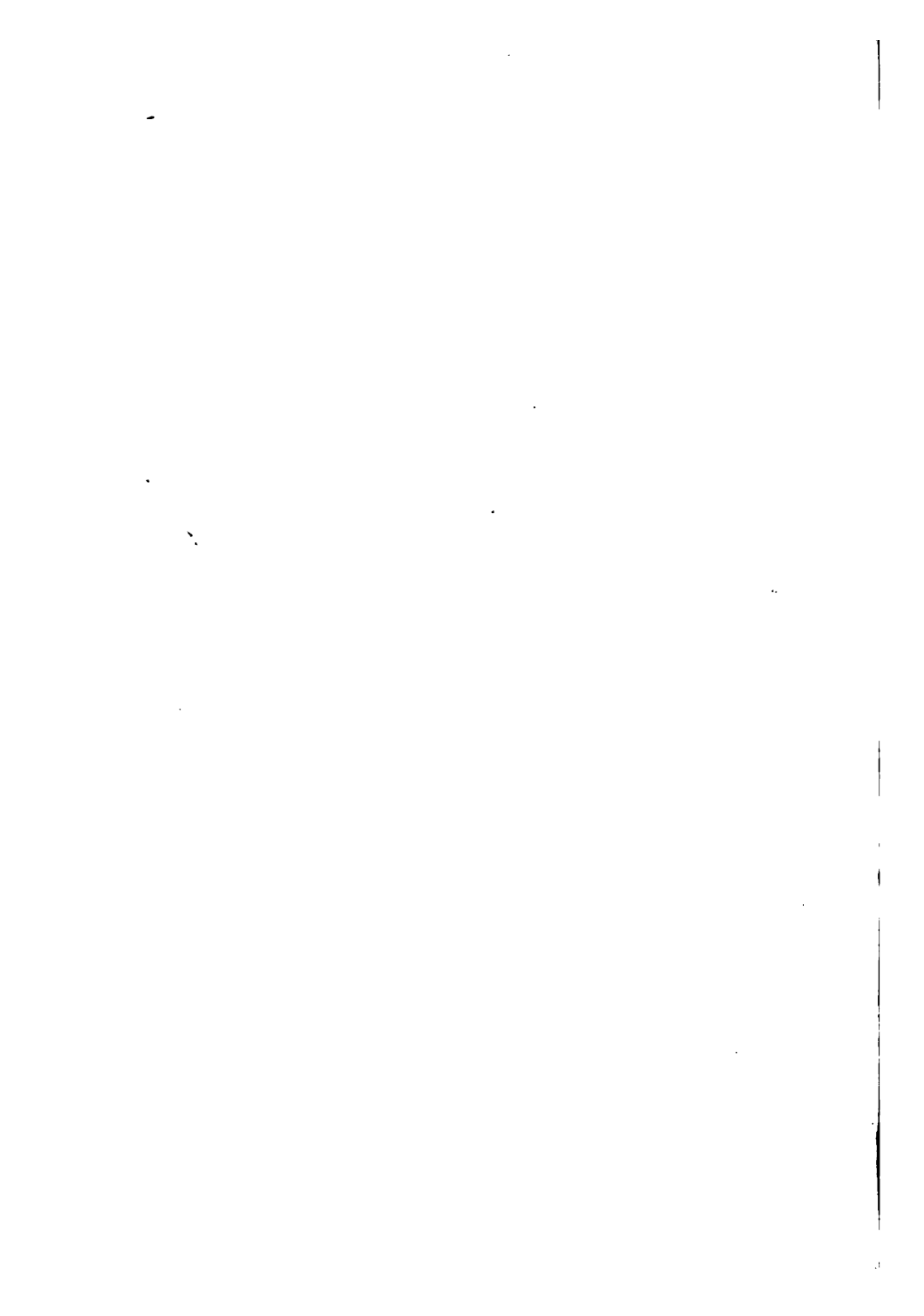


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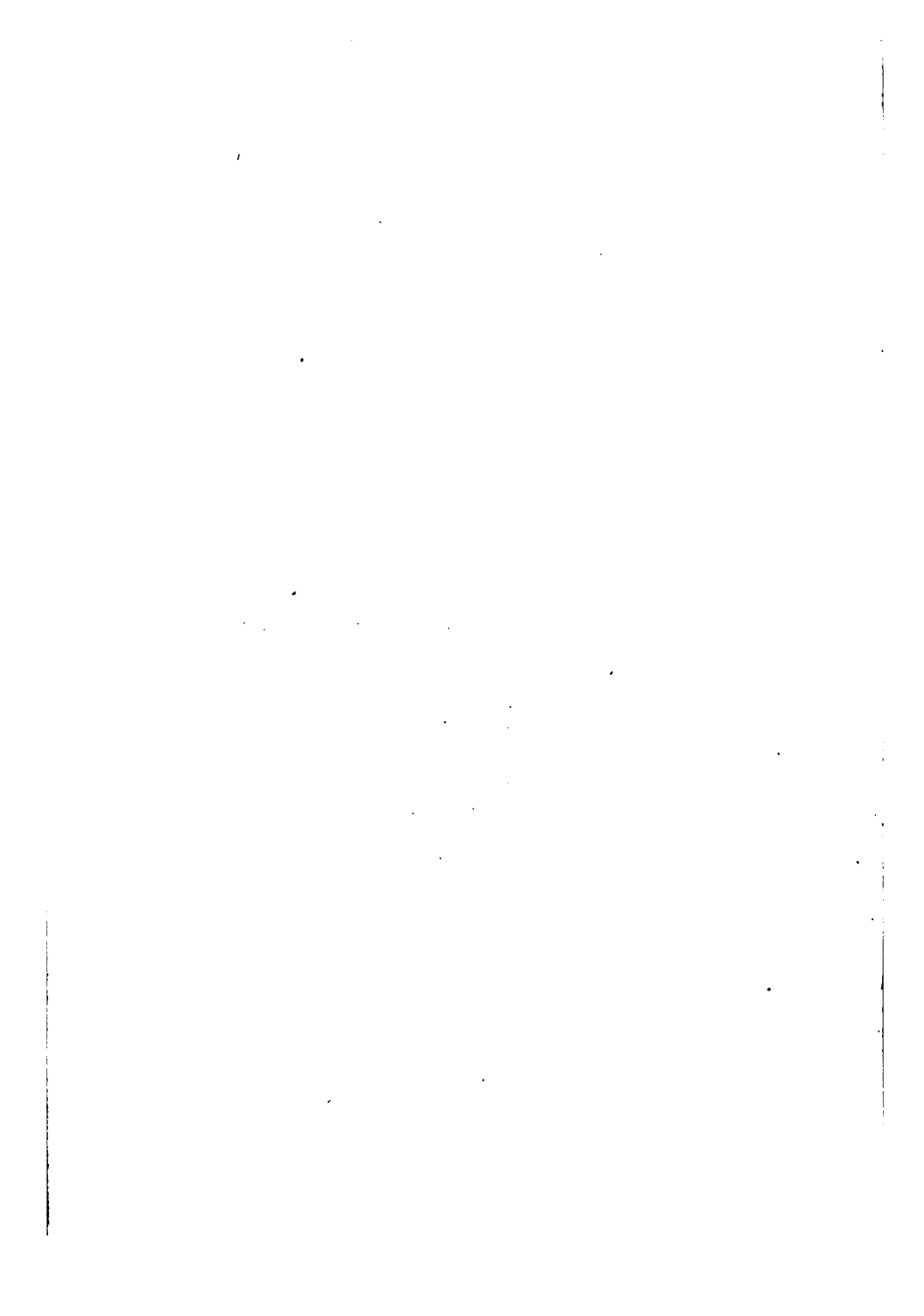




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## A SPANISH MAID





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# A SPANISH MAID

BY

L. QUILLER COUCH

AUTHOR OF "MAN," ETC. ETC.

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ARTHUR H. HENRY AND  
TALBOT F. HENRY  
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To  
My Teacher

20/27



## CHAPTER I.

THE afternoon sun glared down upon the plain and upon the one rough tent which alone broke the even stretch of the ground. All around lay silence and a dry, dazzling desolation as if the world were dead and the sun had come here to gloat upon his own superior longevity. East, west, north, south, as far as an eye could see, the bare land stretched until it met the wonderful, radiating sky, with never a mound or a hillock to cast a shadow or shut the view. Nothing but the solitary tent, and, at the back of that tent, a woman—dead.

There were no comforts here for the easing of death ; not the commonest aids or simplest reliefs. A pair of unskilful hands, guided by a mad, overcharged heart, had raised this gibbose shelter to the end that death might at least come under cover, and the last throes be hidden from the merciless face of the scorching,

unabashed sun overhead. A tumbled layer of gaudy shawls formed the deathbed, and one shawl of vivid scarlet covered the rigid body to the waist, but the bloodless features were bare, as were the ivory hands crossed saint-like on the breast.

The face of the dead woman was finely cut and handsome, framed on either side with loose waves of jetty hair, but the curved nostrils, the curling lip, the set chin left the silent declaration that the heart of her had held tumults—passion, love, anger—as plainly as if the words had been written across her features. Such a woman—such a woman as this still shape had been—must have grasped the beaker of Life with both hands fiercely, and have drunk to the depths of rapture and pain, in reckless, uncalculating draughts, never in cautious sips. God would not match those features to a placid life. But now the tumult and the fierceness were over. Death had put out the fire from her eyes, had smoothed the passion lines from her face, had wrested away the wild power of her will, and had left only a wonderful calm.

At the door of the shelter stood a living figure—the figure of a girl, white and tense; her eyes fixed on the sunny Spanish plain stretching away before her, seeing nothing, hearing nothing. Only in her small brown hands was there any sign of life, as they gripped and

loosened one another in a monotony of anguish, leaving ten bloodless spots each time the fingers' tension was relaxed. And this living face at the door, in spite of soft curves and young bloom, was as the face of the dead woman upon the gaudy bed within ; holding the same possibilities, the same elements of passion —restraint unknown, calm impossible.

And the hours passed on.

The day colours on the plain became dyed in the flush of sunset and still the girl stood there, motionless except for the ceaseless grip of her hands.

By-and-bye a slow dimness fell on everything and the still figure grew indistinct in the doorway beneath the paling sky. Inside the tent the shadows deepened to blackness, except where the faint light, creeping through the doorway, lay on the motionless form on the shawls.

At length a large uneven moon rose up on one side of the sky, and a musical call in the far distance sent its echoes across the silent plain. The sound roused the girl to the realisation of the pain which had been swelling in her heart. She turned from the outside world with a sob, and faced round ; but the contrast from the brightness of the moonlight to the shadowy tent struck on her heart with a great stab of desolation and falling on her knees by the dead woman, a wailing,

childish moan broke from her—the moan of a young thing yearning to be comforted. But the cold, passionless face gave back no sympathy. There was no comfort to be given; nothing but desolation and an unspeakable future.

When the moon, rising higher, threw a broad white shaft through the doorway, it lighted a strange scene. The girl had ceased her moaning. For an hour or more she had knelt there with the misery surging into full life in her heart. Passionately, despairingly, she had implored some word or token from the cold, unresponsive lips. "Mother! My mother!" she had sobbed beseechingly, her cry rising to an anguished wail. "My mother! all that I love! speak to me again! Tell me again, must I do it? Say once more that you loved me best, and I will even go to him. Oh my mother! my beloved!"

But no response had come from the dead lips.

Then, at length, as her cry rang unanswered, and the silence mocked at her misery and her undesired worship, all the evil in her—a thick sediment—rose in defiance. She realised that she was alone, that the mother who had claimed and accepted all her adoration had left her to misery and loneliness; and she raved at the dead woman so impotent and so indifferent.

"Go back to that devil and his tribe? Go back and



be of his people? Go back to be a tortured slave? I will *not* go!"

She rose from the ground. Her eyes flashed, and a spot burned on each cheek as if seared with a pointed iron; her small hands were clenched, and the last remnants of love and mourning went dying from her heart. The girl was changed utterly.

"You are dead," she cried, in hard contempt, "I have to live; and the wide-stretched plains of Spain are too narrow to hold me and—my chief."

She quivered with her rage; and then, with a swift, cruel movement, she snatched a soft, scarlet scarf from beneath the head of the dead woman she had caressed so passionately a short hour before, and winding it round her own dark face and shoulders, turned from the still form without another look or word of parting, and ran from the tent, out into the moonlight and across the solitude of the plain.

For an hour or more there was silence. The soft thud of the girl's retreating feet had died quickly away in the distance, and no living ear was there to conjure back their echoes. The plain was bright and shadowless as at noon, and the dead woman lay unmolested on her bright draperies, white, and wonderfully beautiful in the broad stream of moonlight which fell upon her.

At length, away across the plain, at the back of the

shelter, a dark mass grew slowly out of nothingness—a dark mass which gradually drew nearer and nearer, and, in so doing, lengthened, and curved, and advanced, as some strange and gigantic serpent; and then, as the night minutes passed, this serpent, drawing yet nearer, took shape, and showed itself to be a slowly-marching line of men and beasts, wending their way onwards across the plain. Nearer still they came, a tribe of Spanish wanderers, strong-built and swarthy, with heavily-burdened mules bearing their food and few possessions, and a handful of dark-skinned women following in their train.

Suddenly the foremost figure halted; his eyes had sighted the unusual presence of the little tent upon the broad white stretch of the plain before him. Wheeling about, he uttered a clear, musical call which rang out weirdly in the stillness, and at the sound of it the long line of wanderers came to a standstill. There was a trampling of hoofs, a short confusion of voices, and then the leader, giving over his mule to the care of the man nearest him, advanced alone.

A swarthy, sinewy man he was, of enormous height, in well-worn velvet, with a broad silken sash bound about his waist. He came with a steady, swinging stride, with the notes of a wild, solemn-sounding chant upon his lips, with careless courage in his heart, to

seek chance booty. Then, placing his hand upon the gleaming handle of his knife, he held aside the curtain of the tent and stooped to enter the doorway.

What he saw there seemed to startle him, for he uttered a sharp cry of wonder, and stepping quickly back, tore the loose curtain from its supports that the full light might fall on all. But when this was done, when the cold moonlight shone down unshadowed, a sudden power seemed to hold him still and rigid, and there were many moments of absolute silence. Then suddenly, the man leaned forward with horror and amazement graven deep upon his face, and another subdued cry broke from him. His starting eyes held fear in them, and recognition. And suddenly he knew that the search of years had come to an end.

It was no spirit-fancy, no trick of the brain. The still, white woman on the bed was real—and dead! As the man realised it his hand grew weak upon his knife, and his tongue clave dry to his mouth; and then an anger which had blazed in his heart for years was deadened for a while. In time, as he stood and looked down upon the woman, some of the deadened anger blazed back to fierce life again, but mingling with it came the fire of another mighty passion—a passion older than his wrath—it was his love! And he gripped the handle of his knife again as the two passions fought in his heart.

He had hunted her so long, with vengeance in his heart and curses on his lips, to repay those old days when she had tricked and foiled him, maddened and bewitched him, stabbing his very soul with jealousy till he hated her as fiercely as he had loved her, yet holding him, strong man as he was, enthralled in her power even while he longed to kill her. This dead woman had played a cruel, one-sided game, until that day—the day on which his turn began, the birthday of Teresa. Then he had returned her pain for pain, unsparing, illimitable. How he had gloried in it! How she had winced and fought when he had tortured the child! How her fury had eased his fever of pain! But she had baulked him again, and the fever was but fiercer when she stole her child and fled from him.

To-night it seemed to him that that flight belonged to some long past age, it rose so far away in his memory. Ever since that day he had followed, seeking her with his implacable anger seething ceaselessly in his heart. And now he had found her, within reach of his hand. He might seize her if he would, and crush her in his grip; he might clutch at her rounded throat, or strike her across her curling lips. But she was white and dead, and unresisting. Even as he looked his anger ebbed away; he forgot her fickle heart and her wild witcheries. He forgot the child who had basked in the love which

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had been held back from him, and he stood staring down at the still face, and the night hours wore on, and the lines about his rigid mouth grew softer; and at last he stooped and smoothed her icy forehead with his hard, brown hand; and then he kneeled, all trembling, and clasped his arms about the stiffening body.

The moon, which had looked so long upon the white woman on her scarlet bed, turned her gentle face away and left the scene dim and unwitnessed. And the night passed silently.

At length the cheery young dawn, ignorant of the moon's mercy and less considerate, came to take her place, looking with a rosy face athwart the plain, on living and on dead alike. As his warm flush rested on the woman's face, giving to it a fictitious glow more ghastly than its own pallor, the man raised the body from its resting-place, and taking it in his arms as if it were a sleeping child, bore it away from the ruins of the shelter he had torn from it, to the waiting tribe in the distance.

"You did not call," said the man who stepped forward to meet him.

"I did not need you," answered the chief.

"You have found her?" the brown-skinned men and women questioned eagerly, noting his burden.

"I have found her," he replied tersely.

"Does she submit?" they demanded.

"She is dead," he declared.

"Dead!" they cried in amazement. "Dead! And the girl—Teresa?"

But he was laying his burden with rough care upon the ground and did not heed them.

"The girl, Teresa, what of her?" they persisted.

"Teresa, Teresa!" he murmured absently, "I had forgotten Teresa." Then, rousing himself, the evil light came back into his eyes. "We will seek her by-and-bye," he promised.

## CHAPTER II.

“**W**E will seek her by-and-bye.”

The ear of Teresa's imagination heard the words and gauged the value of the note which ran through them; also, she could see the evil light in those eyes, and could feel again the stinging lash and the pointed goad; and she knew that the seeking would be relentless.

The moon had looked down upon her flight; and the pink dawn which struck across her mother's face as she lay under the eyes of her captor, fell on the girl hurrying westward from the pursuit of the one living being she feared. Others she could trick and cajole—she had done so a hundred times—but there could be neither tricks nor cajoleries with the father who stood to her in lieu of devil. He knew them all and acted according to that knowledge.

She might have been some spirit of evil—this girl, Teresa—as she hurried on her way; her lithe body curving forward in her impatience, her dark eyes burning, the gaudy shawl wound about her, demanding

rather than pleading for food at the villages through which she passed. And the peasants, as they looked into her face, read something in her imperious eyes which taught them either charity or terror, for they gave her what she asked and ventured no question in return. To the length of her journey she paid no heed, nor did she note the morning give place to noonday and noonday to evening; the night itself was but a hindrance, nothing more.

At last, one morning, when the darkness had rolled back from the land, her eager eyes looked on the wonderful welcome of the sea, bordering the horizon and melting into the mist of the sky above it; and her heart-beats came hurrying with her gladness as she gazed and gazed, and scented the brine of it in the breeze. In spite of her long tramp, with its scant meals and grudging haltings, her lids were wide and her steps light as she reached the crowded, evil-smelling town and stood upon the bustling quay.

It was still early morning, but the sun was wide-awake now, and as he turned his great hot face on his cloud-pillow he rolled back the thin pink mist curtain from over the waters, and opened his blazing eyes upon the world, gilding all the masts, and ropes, and limply-hanging sails at anchor in the bay. It was all a wonderful sight to the girl of the plains, and she sank



on to a rough stone bench, unnoticed by the chattering, chaffering men and women round about her, and looked out beyond the harbour.

This was what she had come for. This was why she had toiled on through heat, and glare, and darkness. To reach the sea, and sail, and sail, away to some other land—some far-distant land—where that pursuing devil could never find her. And she must not rest, nor loiter; even now he was hurrying nearer to her; each moment meant a closer step.

But though, in truth, there were the ships, she who needed them so sorely was yet helpless on the shore, without money or a friend; and as she sat, and looked, and thought, she realised her extremity, and her pulses beat fever-fast, and her temples throbbed.

As she sat there chafing, gripping her hot hands and breathing quick breaths, with her desperate, darting eyes she noted, apart from all the other craft, a strange, dark, square-rigged vessel, lying at anchor in the distance; and, as she noted it, her eyes became riveted, so curious a ship it was—almost graceful, yet almost evil. To Teresa it seemed, all suddenly, that, from this ship, invisible arms reached out to hold her, to draw her, and she watched and watched until it seemed as if her soul's welfare were entangled in its cordage. As the last traces of the morning mist melted into the sky, she

could see that many men were moving on the deck, and that then a boat was lowered and lay for some minutes heaving on the water. After a while two figures clambered down the vessel's side, and stepping into the boat pushed it off, then a strip of daylight showed between boat and vessel, and the boat drew slowly and silently towards the quay.

The two men at the oars pulled with long, indolent strokes, and Teresa, watching, forgot her fears and her weariness, and all the noise and strangeness of the scene about her, as the boat moved across the wonderful blue of the waters toward the dull green stone-work of the quay. There, having made fast their ropes to the iron ring, the men stepped out, and climbing the steep, tide-washed steps, mingled with the noisy, bargaining crowd. Teresa, leaning forward on her bench to watch them as they came in view, drew back with a quick gasp of horror as she looked upon them closely. She had never seen men such as these before. Unlike the swarthy Spaniards she had always looked upon, these men were small and ghastly, with lank, colourless hair, and pale faces, clear and swelled as the faces of drowned persons.

For many minutes her eyes followed them as they passed and repassed silently in the throng, staring before them with pale, abstracted eyes which seemed

to focus nothing. And then a quick decision came to Teresa. There was no time now to spare for the weighing of right against wrong ; she could think of no better chance ; and, without a moment's hesitation, she rose from the bench and walked away from the busy sailors and the chafferers, and stole down the slimy green steps to the boat which lay moored at the foot of them. Then she stepped into it and looked about her.

Above she could hear the voices of the people, gossiping and bargaining, exchanging their news and their wares with equal readiness for fresh details and current coin respectively. Around lay the heaving sea, blue and sparkling. At a distance, apart from the ordinary busy craft, loomed the strange black vessel with its curious rigging. And there in the boat she stood alone, rocking gently at the foot of the dark steps and considering of her course.

As the girl paused, her eyes fell upon some dark sail-cloth lying up in the boat's bow, and again her decision was swift. Glancing hurriedly upward to note that she was unobserved, she crawled to the bow and drew the sail-cloth lightly over herself, and lay there motionless, painfully conscious of the leaping pulses which beat in her throat and ears.

Before half-an-hour had passed, the white-faced oars-

men came down the steps again to their boat, and, loosing her, silently took their places at the rowlocks. They brought nothing with them from the town, and they said no word to one another, but they gripped their oars and pulled slowly away from the quay towards the vessel outside the harbour. They had not glanced towards the sail-cloth in the bows, and Teresa strove to check the rise and fall of her breast as she lay gasping under the weight of it. When she reckoned that the distance to the ship must be well-nigh covered, she softly bared her face and looked about her. The vessel was near now, and here and there at the sides she could see men moving and working intently, and she guessed that they were preparing for departure. The men in the boat heard none of her careful movements, but pulled steadily on unconscious of the freight aboard.

Suddenly she spoke, and her voice was high and imperious. The men as suddenly ceased their rowing, and, turning slowly, looked at her. Their awful faces struck a chill at her heart, and as their pale, unearthly eyes met hers, she shivered in the hot sunshine; but the wild, hurrying thought of the man who was pursuing her, brought with it a sharp intolerance of her own weakness.

"I wish to cross the sea," she declared, the commanding power in her eyes rivalling the anger now

gleaming in theirs. "I wish to sail to another land. Your vessel will soon be on its way, and I desire to sail in it."

Her words which began so imperiously trailed off into a note of pleading, as the strength of her will recognised a still stronger will in these terrible men ; but when she had ceased there was silence. The pallid brows of the men were scowling ; a narrow line of clenched teeth showed from between their lips, but they uttered no sound.

Then suddenly they started to their feet, and with gripped hands stood before her, and the boat swayed perilously, and the girl's heart thumped as if to choke her. She had been in desperate straits and disinclined to cavil at any means which could bring her to a stranger-land, but between the ever-present terror which was so surely following her across the plains, and these ghastly men who faced her with death in their eyes, she quivered for a moment as with some bodily sickness, her heart shrank small, and she felt that the touch of these clear, white fingers would throw her shrieking into madness. With her eyes riveted on the eyes which glared back into hers she crouched in the bows, while the silence seemed most awful, and, in it, her own words struck back on her ears, and echoed and hung upon the hot air.

Then, with a hellish look on his face, the nearer man started forward to seize her; his swelled hand clawed the air and almost clutched her; but with one dominant instinct impelling her—to escape that touch—she sprang back quickly and turned to jump from the boat into the water as it gently lapped against the prow. In an instant the second man had gripped his fellow by the shoulder, and again they stood in silence with but their attitudes rearranged—one pallid man in the grip of the other, the girl with her foot on the edge of the swaying boat ready to plunge, and the hot morning sun shining merrily down on all.

As they stood, in this wise, waiting for Fate to dictate the next move, a mournful wail came to them across the waters. The men turned their eyes towards the dark ship, and they noted that she was ready to heave anchor and move upon her way. Then again they turned and looked back at the stretch of sea to be retraced if they were to rid themselves of this girl. And the quay was far, and the ship was near; and, grinding their teeth in silent rage, they took their oars again and pulled swiftly towards the vessel.

In this fashion Fate dictated; and the girl's future moved a step closer. Whether in relief or terror she must go forward now in the power of the men she had thought to cajole; and she crouched again in the bow in silence.

When the boat reached the high, black side of the ship the men climbed swiftly up to the deck leaving Teresa to follow as she could. At the top of the ladder many faces were gathered to confront her—sullen, amazed, resentful faces—but she was there, on their deck, with a stretch of sea on every side, and, despite their anger, they were forced to let her be; there was no time now for the bandying of words. The light winds springing up were not to be wasted for a girl's whims; and the anchor was raised, the sails flapped, then slowly swelled in the capricious breeze, and the square-rigged vessel glided slowly over the waters, with the silent, white-faced crew to guide her on her way.

And the Spaniard stood alone and apart, with an alert look, half-fear, half-triumph in her dark eyes. That white-faced crew chilled her very blood when they moved near to her, but she was free, she had escaped, she was sailing to other lands; and the voyage could not last for ever.

Some dark, unhallowed souls, it has been told, roam ever, accursed and void of peace, over the broad, deep waters of the world, crying aloud in some rare periods, out of their unbearable anguish, but more often sailing on, with stern and pallid faces, betraying by no sign, nor cry, nor tremor the agony scorching in their

veins and tearing their souls. So did this dark, evil-seeming ship, with its deathlike crew, move slowly over the face of the ocean, silent and awful, as a floating casket of Death's trophies, a group of lost, tortured souls; but for that one figure of living discord, a spot of garish brilliance, crude against the gloomy pallor—glowing, half-triumphant; standing out as a spirit quick with evil, in a company of still, enduring sin.

Time was unheeded on board the black ship. Night and day went unregarded. On, and on, and always on, over an endless waste of waters. And when the fervid shores of Spain had suddenly faded from sight came no more shores, no signs of life nor means of living; nothing but boundless, heaving water. Always water, always silence; always a gloomy, unseen presence, as of Death, hovering in the air. And the past lengthened, and the future drew nearer, as the ship moved on, and in the present there sat that vivid figure upon the dark deck, reckless, yet half-fearful. And the pale men passed and repassed her as they went about their work; and she saw that they hated her, and she knew that if a finger's touch from their clear hands should fall upon her she must shriek in terror. Yet, so long as the finger's touch did not fall upon her, nor the eyes do more than glower, she laughed at their awesome faces, and her own eyes glittered



cruelly as she filled in the grave of the one tenderness her heart had ever known—the love for her mother—and buried it for ever.

And the sky above, and the waters below, were just two wide, unbounded stretches of changeless blue.

"I dream—in very truth, I dream," the girl would murmur, "and yet this is no dream."

And at length, after a spell of time—moments, or days, or hours—of strange unreality, Teresa rose from the coil of black ropes on which she had rested, and, tossing aside her fear, kept only the recklessness. A wild heedlessness possessed her. She paced the deck lightly, to and fro, to and fro, spreading her hands to the empty air, singing gay snatches of the passionate wander-songs she had learned from her mother. It pleased her to hear her own full notes, from defiant rise to mournful cadence, cut the great silence, to stretch her limbs in protest of her liberty. It gave her courage; and with the courage came pleasure, as she noted the angry amazement of the crew as they gazed upon her.

But even as she noted it, a sudden wild change rolled across the sky and fell upon the water. The strange spell of peace which her voice had broken passed away. A fierce anger seemed to fill the air, tearing the sky and lashing the sea. The ship heaved and lurched

as it met the boiling waves; the foam seethed round about its prow. Across the heavens flamed a jagged line of fire, fearful and continuous. The masts creaked and shivered; the loose canvas billowed and struck with cracks as of pistol shots, then was rent with a tearing moan as of a human voice in anguish. And the wind roared, and boomed, and wailed; and the merry sun shrouded his face in awe.

Teresa, with her lithe arms still outstretched, the mocking smile in her eyes and her gay song yet in her throat, stood suddenly still in unutterable wonder, half-fancying that some mad chorus had clashed forth to swell her song. But in a moment the sense of danger overwhelmed her, and she ran from side to side of the ship in a panic of fear, crying aloud for help and comfort in her terror.

But as she faced the silent men a yet greater terror fell upon her—terror of a fate crueller and more sure than wind, or waves, or fire; for a row of fierce, implacable, white faces met her eyes, and hatred, fury, and threat of death came towards her in every silent breath. For a moment she stood, blanched and cowering, with her heart all weak and small in her shivering body, as she looked into the unyielding eyes and read the strength of their determination.

She had forced her way to their ship; she had

defied and ignored them; she had paced their silent decks in her noisy insolence, her eyes flashing, her arms waving, and her wild songs surging to the sea and sky. And the sea and sky had answered her evil incantations with anger and vengeance. Were they, this hopeless vessel's hopeless crew, to suffer the wrath of Heaven for her sinfulness as well as for their own? Were they to be swept from their one small foothold by the blasphemous mockery of an unbidden demon? They glared and snarled at her with their pale eyes and swelled, clear lips, and looking back at them she seemed to read her doom.

"Ah!" she shrieked in terror, as her heart grew faint and her limbs rigid, "let me go from you! Let me go!"

At the sound of her voice they rushed towards her, and then, in the horror and dread of their touch her heart beat again madly; again she moved her lips to shriek, but her voice seemed to have died, and she staggered back, frenzied and desperate, to the ship's side. But there, against a coil of cordage, lay a keen-bladed hatchet, and, in an instant, she had seized it, and was cleaving the air wildly, brandishing it in the desperate faces now closely confronting her. But scornful of one girl's puny strength, they closed upon her, their lank hair blowing in the gale, their ghastly features

lighted by the flames which shot across the sky. The strength against the girl was overwhelming, but her mad fear forced her to attempt defence, and raising the hatchet high to her head she brought it down heavily upon the arm stretched first to clutch her.

Then, above the roar and tumult of the storm her shrieks rose again, wild and panic-stricken, for the shock of the blow came thrilling back through her arteries. The deck shook as if its timbers were tearing asunder; and with glaring, dilated eyes she saw that the gaping wound which the steel had left upon the outstretched arm was white and bloodless as the outer skin.

Then, still shrieking, Teresa felt the cold, thick hands fasten upon her, gripping her arms and congealing her surging blood. The horror of it turned her faint and cold, impotent to resist the strength ranged against her, unable even to spring to the waves which rose to the deck to meet her. And the tempest raged, and the black ship rolled, as the dumb sailors dragged the Spaniard to the side to hurl her down into the seething waters.

But, as they raised her in their arms, a scorching glare of light blazed upon them all, searching the very hearts of the passionate men; and the ghastly remembrance of a terrible past raged in them. With one impulse they stayed their hands; the girl swayed back, and there

fell on all things—sea, sky, and ship—a breathless pause.

For a full minute it seemed that the whole world had died, and the men stood rigid, as fearful of the death as of the living presence of the Spaniard.

Then again the hurricane tore across the sky ; the spell was broken ; and again the sailors gripped the girl, and, binding her with ropes, carried her shrieking to the hold.

And the lightning shivered across the sky, and the waters raged, and the dark ship flew before the roaring wind.

### CHAPTER III.

THE fury of the storm was tremendous as it swept over the point of Western England on that black September night, and Landecarrook village felt it in full measure. The wind tore, wailing, round the weather-stained church upon the cliff; it bent the slanting tombstones yet lower to the earth. It bowed and buffeted the stunted trees which had battled bravely with so many storms before this night, snapping their weaker boughs with no measure of mercy. It shrieked angrily through the one narrow street; it deafened the quick ears of Peter Ludgven, the coastguard, as he struggled along the rugged cliff path, with his face turned seawards, sometimes crawling on hands and knees round a more sheltered corner into the full blast of the hurricane and the drenching rain, sometimes sinking beside a broken hillock to draw a few breaths with some regularity; and it soughed with angry, wailing sobs about the coastguard's cottage, where Mary Ludgven, his wife, sat at the uncurtained, rain-washed

window, pale and heavy-lidded with anxiety, and strained her eyes through the lattice into the wild darkness outside, rocking the cradle with her foot the while; the slow, rhythmic movement belying the quick throbs of her troubled heart; for, in this bare end of the land, men had been hurled down from the cliff to the sea by the power of gentler storms than this.

Peter Ludgven's wife was a calm, brave woman, but to watch and wait inactive comes near to heroism when there is love in the heart. As the night wore on it seemed to her ears that, above the shriek of the wind, she could hear shrieks of human voices, rising in wild calls or wailing in dire need. A great fear rose swelling in her throat and drained the blood from her lips, and again and again she left the cradle-side and went to the door. And then the sudden blast which met her would make her stagger with its strength, and pulling the door close behind her, she would stand, all trembling with anxiousness, outside upon the doorstone.

If the fibres of the ears could break with the tension of listening Mary Ludgven would have been a deaf woman from that night. Hearing was a treacherous sense in such a hurricane, but she stood and battled with the gale and with her own agony of mind, and the rain beat down and drenched her. At length came a lull, and, in spite of straining ears, she could hear

nothing of the voices which had drawn her from her small son's side in the face of Peter's wishes, and she went back to the warm kitchen and again sat by the uncurtained window with eyes turned to the storm, and with white face and gripped hands endured the pain of waiting.

But the night hours wore away at last, and with the dawn the shrieks of the wind grew fainter, dying into sobs, first passionate, then quite gentle. The morning light showed a grey and sullen sky; the sea was grey and sullen, too, dashing high and foamy up the straight, dark cliffs. But across the storm-clouds in the east there broke a bar of wonderful metal-bright glory. The air was fresh, and smelling sweet of sodden turf and rain-drenched thyme; the garden paths were strewn with torn leaves and broken twigs; the summer greenery, which had withstood the storm's buffetings, hung all wet and shining from the rain; and the little pink monthly roses over the porch were storm-faint, and washed, and drooping, when Peter Ludgven, drenched to the skin, and ruddy with the rough treatment of the gale, came safely home to his wife.

"You never ought to a-married me, Peter," she said, quietly, with a beautiful, glad light in her eyes. "I'm too fearsome for a coastguard's wife."

"I couldn't help it, Mary Ludgven," he protested,



laughing, as he took her, baby and all, into his strong arms, "an' now 'tis too late."

"'Twas a most terrible night, Peter," she half-whispered, her head resting against his shoulder. "We haven't had nothin' like it since we was married. An' I sat there by the window most all the time, waitin' for the mornin's light to come, an' all afraid what 'twould show when 'twas here. I b'leeve if anythin' had a-happened—oh, my dear, my dear——" she broke off in little sobbing laughs.

"Come, Mary, 'tish' so bad as all that my dear. Here'm I come back to 'ee all safe an' sound. 'Tis you'm most like to be leavin' me to live a widder-man, I'm thinkin'," he declared cheerily. "You'm weak with watchin'. Now I'll be off to slip out of my wet things, an' then I'm ready for what's smellin' so good over there on the peats."

Mary Ludgven frowned a quick, smiling frown of self-condemnation as she moved from Peter's arms and seated the baby in his cradle.

"Here'm I crakin' an' cryin' when you'm starvin' with cold an' hunger," she exclaimed. "But I didn't forget 'ee so bad as all that; breakfast will be ready by time you'm in your dry things."

In the comfort of the breaking sunlight, and the food, and cheerful kitchen, together with the sight of Peter

at the other end of the table, and the baby contentedly chewing his fists in the cradle, Mary Ludgven forgot some of the suspense of the night hours, and ate and smiled till a flush of colour came back to her cheeks, and her hands ceased from trembling.

"You must take a rest, now, Mary," urged Peter, as he followed her up the steep, wooden stairs with his son, Zel—short for Ezekiel—in his arms.

"Rest!" she laughed, "with that flaygerrying child calling out to be washed an' dressed!" And she caught him from his father's hold, and tossed him till he crowed and chuckled in as thorough a manner as his pleasure and his breath would allow.

"You'll be dyin' with sleep before long," he protested.

"No; cold water's best for me now. I couldn't keep still if I was paid to."

And when her face was all wet and rosy with the cold spring water, and the drops hung on her fair, silken hair, Peter kissed her laughingly, for she reminded him, he said, of the hedges and gardens when the storm was safe over. And then she left him to the sleep he had earned, and went downstairs to her daily work.

As she moved about her stone-flagged kitchen, singing softly to the small son who sat in his cradle

and ignored everything but the string of empty cotton reels which he strove to wind about his own pink toes, a hand gently lifted the latch and the door opened.

"Hist! Mary," came a whisper, "Peter back all right?"

Mary looked up from her big brown basin of flour, and saw 'Zekiel—her brother—at the open door-latch, with a look of quick enquiry on his handsome, boyish face.

"Yes, Peter's back, safe and sound, thanks be. Come in, 'Zekiel, an' shut the door; you mustn' keep the boy in that draught."

"'Twas a night!" remarked 'Zekiel, as he did as he was bidden and crossed over to the open hearth, heaving that sigh of admiration paid to excessive fury by the simple-minded. "I was just goin' down to the beach to see if there's anythin' to be seen; 'tisin' likely nothin's the worse for such a gale as that. I thought I'd just look fore to see if Peter had a-got back."

"He's up restin' now a bit. He's had a tryin' time, lately. People hereabouts ain't so clean-handed as they'd have folks believe; and 'tisin' no child's-play coast-guardin', I can tell that much."

"No, that's truth," agreed 'Zekiel, as he leaned over

the cradle and pinched his nephew's pink toes with his own brown fingers. "Well, I'll be off," he said at length, as Mary freed her hands of flour, and turned to stir the peats. "But, if Peter's restin', you might so well come along with me an' have a look at the sea; 'tis grand now, sure enough, an' the air is mild as milk."

Mary glanced slowly from the clock in the corner to the sunlight on the garden. "I don't mind if I do," she said. "I don't feel like sleepin' at all. You mind Zel while I put the bread to rise, an' then I'll come."

To the high point of the sloping cliff they mounted and stood on the wet, green turf to watch the spumy waters beneath as they seethed and dashed over the face of the rocks; and the sun brightened everything with his great morning smile, as if he delighted to look merrily upon another's fury. After watching the waters for some minutes, 'Zekiel left his sister's side and strolled along close to the edge of the cliff; while she, resting after the quick walk from the cottage, looked away over the sea; and then, forgetting the grandeur of it all, looked back again at the white stones marking the coastguard's uneven cliff path, and thought of Peter.

Mary Ludgven had been born and bred in Lande-

carrock, had followed its manners and abided by its fashions, and birth and breeding, manner and fashion, had done well for her, for she was a beautiful woman. A veritable Madonna she looked, standing there with the wild, torn sky above her, the roaring water below, and the morning sun and the morning mist making almost a halo about her—a peaceful figure in the midst of the signs of past tumult. A large, fair woman with a grave, contented face, her golden hair parted over her broad, white forehead, her smooth cheeks slightly pale from the anxious night-watch, but with a faint colour creeping back to them; her eyes as wells of colour, deep and tranquil. The gown she wore was of dark blue woollen stuff, and knotted about her shoulders was a loose black kerchief, leaving her white throat bare; and in her arms she held her little son.

Presently, back over the short, sodden turf came 'Zekiel, hurrying towards her, calling to her as he came and pointing out to sea. Her eyes followed the direction of his hand, and then she saw, looming through the sunny mist, a large, dark, square-rigged ship, and she shivered, as with an ague, as her eyes fell upon it.

"A queer-lookin' craft," panted 'Zekiel, as he reached her side. "I don't know as ever I saw such a riggin' before."

They stood and watched the dark ship, and a strange unreality in the sight seemed to rob them of words. The high, dark bows and oddly-shaped sails had loomed so suddenly through the mist, and were coming so perilously near the rocks; yet the vessel was neither wrecked nor drifting, and no signal for aid or information came from her crew.

"Look, look!" cried Mary, suddenly, in a harsh whisper. And 'Zekiel looked, and again they stood there silent, their eyes riveted on the ship below.

What they saw was quickly over and past, but the strangeness and cowardice of it seemed to scorch deep into their brains, as if they had been looking on at the scene for hours in wonder and growing rage.

The tall, gloomy ship drew nearer and nearer, until, as Mary and 'Zekiel looked down on her, she seemed to be almost underneath the cliff on which they stood, and they saw that about her deck moved a ghastly-faced crew, busy casting anchor and lowering a boat. When this was done a slight scarlet figure was dragged, struggling and shrieking, upon the deck, fighting and beating with clenched hands till held and pinioned by the sailors who lifted it, still struggling and shrieking, over the vessel's side, and lowered it to the boat which lay tossing on the yet angry sea. Several other figures, clambering down swiftly to the boat loosed the rope and

began to pull straight towards a little spit of sand to the left of the cliff on which the watchers stood.

There was something of anger and of horror in the eyes and hearts of Mary and 'Zekiel as they watched the boat's course, and saw the scarlet figure held writhing in the arms of the sailors.

"Is it a mazed woman they'm bringin' ashore?" gasped 'Zekiel, in a hoarse, strained voice.

But when the boat grated on the line of shingly beach the rowers made no attempt to land and seek aid from the village in their need, whatever it might be. Lifting the fighting, furious figure with some rough handling, they flung it from them on to the beach as one would fling a bale of wool, and above the roar of the breakers came the wild shrieks again and again, as the creature sprang up and clung to them, clutching and tearing in its fury. But again they flung it back with cruel, white hands, and, pushing the boat off from the beach in haste, rowed quickly back towards the ship.

The cruelty and cowardice of the end of this scene sent the blood seething hot and quick in 'Zekiel's veins, and he tore along the cliff till he reached the narrow foot-path leading to the beach below and clambered down it recklessly. But he reached it too late to lay hands upon the boat's crew, for the whole scene had taken but a few moments in the acting, and a stretch

of foamy breakers already lay between boat and shore.

There, on the sand, however, face downwards, lay the scarlet form, crying aloud, and clutching and tearing at the sand and shingle in a passion of baffled fury.

'Zekiel's heart was full and his fists eager against the brutes whose savage work he had watched, and within him welled a great sympathy toward the castaway. Hurrying to it in its grief, he knelt upon the shingle and raised it in his arms.

"Don't 'ee, don't 'ee, my dear," he began in passionate consolation. And then his voice died, and words would not come; he sat back on his heels and his arms trembled round about their burden, but he neither rose nor loosened his clasp.

She was so wonderful, this creature which he held in the hollow of his arms. She was so beautiful with a beauty he had never dreamed of. Her eyes, with the fury still blazing in them, looked back into his eyes; her long, black hair fell back from her face and his fingers were wound in its meshes; her red lips were parted in the end of rage and the beginning of wonder, and one warm, brown arm lay against his trembling hand.

For many minutes he knelt there, and the roar of the breakers was in his ears, booming and thundering.



Half-consciously he longed for the roar to cease ; it was surging in his head and deafening him ; the volume of sound was swelling and crashing maddeningly. For a moment the beach on which he knelt seemed to rise and sway, and a thin mist floated between his eyes and the eyes which flashed back at him. And then it seemed that the silence he had longed for had come. A great pause seemed to have fallen on everything. He heard nothing ; an absolute peace seemed to surround him, and he knelt there as if spellbound, looking down on the wonderful face of the stranger-girl who lay in his arms. And, as he looked, his boyish face changed ; the youngness and the brightness of it seemed to pass from his to hers, and as her angry eyes softened and smiled up at him with a languorous pleasure, his eyes grew hard and eager.

The sudden shriek of a lonely sea-bird roused him at length ; he started, and the roar and thunder of the sea came back to his ears. Then the stranger-girl lowered her dark-fringed lids slowly over her smiling eyes, and, drawing his gaze from her face, 'Zekiel remembered her wrongs and looked out over the waves. But the evil ship which he had thought to see was invisible ; between his eyes and it there had dropped a thick, white curtain of mist. Ship, and boat, and crew had vanished utterly, and as far as eye

could see, the waves and the land were lonely, and dim, and desolate.

Mary Ludgven, watching and waiting on the cliff above, saw at last two figures coming slowly up the cliff path towards her, a boy half-leading, half-supporting a girl—'Zekiel and the castaway. And even as she watched, all eager to help and comfort the sufferer, her eyes noted suddenly that the boy's face had changed, had grown older; the roundness was gone, and the young, careless glance from the eyes; and, with a curious shock of wonder, she realised that 'Zekiel was no longer her boy-brother. But the eyes of the girl at his side were glowing with ardent youth.

"What is it, 'Zekiel? What does it all mean?" she cried as she went towards them.

"Devilment!" said 'Zekiel slowly, with his eyes still resting on the girl's beauty.

"Are you hurt?" asked Mary of the stranger. But the stranger only smiled sadly and slowly shook her head.

"Bring her along home, 'Zekiel; she's bruised and shaken. I can't make out such doin's. Come home an' let us tell Peter 'bout it all."

And turning their faces from the shrouded sea they went down the hill in silence.

"What outlandish bein' have 'ee got there, Mary Ludgven?"

Over the low cob wall which separated Betty Higgins's back garden from the path, leaned Ann Vitty, Betty's grandmother, gossiping with her favoured cronies, Luke Tregay and Daniel Laskey, who leaned against the outer side and slanted towards her from their sticks, as loosely-staked heliotropes towards their sun. This cob wall was Ann Vitty's *salon*, where she and Luke Tregay met to talk over old times and new manners, and hailed the passers-by with cheery garrulity, enduring the proofs of their degeneration from the former state of things for the sake of their tidings of the latter. Here, too, mild-eyed Daniel Laskey, sexton, joined them, and added to the pleasantness of the meeting by his intelligent silence.

It was Ann Vitty's thin, sharp voice which greeted Mary as she neared the corner by the big fuchsia bush.

"Well, 'tis 'Zekiel's jetsam," answered Mary, trying to smile back at the three old faces.

"Jetsam!" cried Luke Tregay; "queer jetsam that! What be 'ee goin' to do with it now you've a-got it?"

"I dunno what to do," confessed Mary. "We dunno yet who the maid is, or where she comes from,

but we'm goin' to take her home an' tell Peter. He'll know what's best to be done."

"Take her home!" repeated Ann Vitty, looking the stranger up and down with a dubious glance as she passed on slowly, leaning on 'Zekiel's arm. "'Tisn' no business of mine, for sure, but, if you ask me, I should say 'Don't 'ee.' As a figger-head, now, she wouldn't come amiss, but as comp'ny in your own house, I say, I wouldn't if I was you."

"Wreckage of that sort never did nobody no good," remarked Luke Tregay, "not to my knowledge."

"But life's life, Luke," protested Mary, with rather a wan smile.

"Maybe, maybe," he allowed, with some hesitation, "but sometimes we'd be as well pleased if 'twasn'."

"I didn' know there was wrecks," remarked Ann Vitty. "We never heard no tidin's of 'em."

"No, 'tisn' no wreck," Mary explained; "'tis a sort of castaway matter, I'm thinkin'; only me an' 'Zekiel saw it. But I must be hurryin' on, for 'twas a wicked deed, sure enough, and the maid mus'n' lack a welcome."

"H'm," ejaculated Daniel Laskey, looking contemplatively at the dandelion root he had been boring with his stick; but Ann Vitty and Luke Tregay clothed their forebodings in more forcible language

as they watched the three figures along the path and up the little hill to the coastguard's cottage.

The comments of Ann Vitty and Luke Tregay roused Mary Ludgven to a realisation of the coldness and scant welcome which lay in her own heart, and she tried to say some kindly and comforting words now and again to the shivering girl as they walked back to the little whitewashed home on the side of the hill, but all the while her heart was heavy with an unaccountable fear as she glanced from the stranger to 'Zekiel, and saw his flushed cheeks and set lips; and she shrank with an unreasoning presentiment of ill from the vivid, alluring face of the girl who leaned so closely upon the boy's protecting arm.

## CHAPTER IV.

**I**T was when 'Zekiel had placed his wonderful living jetsam in Peter's roomy chair before the blazing peats that he first realised the barrier which rose between himself and her. Taking the bright shawl from her shoulders, all damp with sea-water, he pleaded, in a voice which fell strange on Mary's ears, "Tell us of the brutes who served 'ee so."

But the girl, smiling back at him, opened her lips for the first time since he had raised her from the sand, and spoke in quick, tripping syllables which were to him as strange and incomprehensible as the notes of some foreign bird; carrying no meaning to him, but the one hard fact that between him and her stood an unscaleable barrier—the barrier of an unknown tongue. He stood dumb before the bitter irrevocableness of it, with pain and a sharp hopelessness weighing at the corners of his lips. This sudden limitation of his joy seemed unjust and unendurable.

A sense of impotence and a new half-realised misery swelled in his heart and robbed him of words. But the girl, laying her hand on his arm, smiled again into his eyes with a smile which seemed to need no words, and some of the bitterness of circumstance melted for a while.

And Mary, bringing warm food and heaping the peat upon the hearth, felt as if the whole scene must be a dream from which she would suddenly awake—but a long, long dream which had been with her for dull, weary hours; and when she strove to rouse herself and think of the old, ordinary life, or of the stormy night and the relief of the morning, it seemed to her that those things had happened years ago, and had become dim and faded in her mind. A dogged war was being fought out in her heart—reason against instinct, humanity wrestling with revulsion—and she forced her hands towards hospitality that they might not take the stranger and thrust her out from her doorway and from the sight of the eager boy at her side. But the stranger knew nothing of this war, or made no sign of the knowledge, as she sat in the glow of the peats, drinking hot broth and shedding soft glances on Mary, and 'Zekiel, and little Zel, with a fine impartiality.

When Peter came down the stairs, cheerful from

his sleep, and damp-haired and glowing from his sousing in cold water, he stood at the foot in wonderment at the unexpected scene before him, and looked at his wife with questions in his eyes. Stepping quickly towards him, Mary, in low and pitiful tones, told of what had happened; dwelling on the cruelty of the sailors and the helpless plight of the castaway with a warmth and eagerness unusual to her quiet tongue, as if by convincing others of the girl's wrongs and necessity she might touch the core of her own humanity. And the girl herself, seeming to divine the meaning of the words, laid down her spoon, and with one hand resting lightly on 'Zekiel's arm to stay his generosity, looked up at the coastguard with a mingling of pleading and confidence in her big eyes.

For some moments Peter stood looking back at her in silence, while Mary glanced from one to the other with a strange unrest at her heart; then he went over to the girl, and, taking her brown little hand in both his own, said slowly: "You'm welcome."

For reply the stranger only looked up at him pathetically and shook her head. And 'Zekiel finished the tale which Mary had begun, telling of that which, to him, seemed the saddest part of all—the baffling, incomprehensible language.



Again Peter looked at the girl, this time in rueful silence, running his fingers through his damp curls in the stress of his perplexity; but his was never a desponding nature, and in time his courage brought him some inspiration. Standing before her, drawn to his full height, and with an eagerness on his face which commanded her whole attention, he looked about for some object on which to begin his plan; finally, pointing to his wife, he pronounced in two broad, distinct syllables her name, "Ma—ry." Again and again he said it, and after a while a quick comprehension leaped to the girl's eyes, and laughingly she repeated, with a short, babyish accent, "Ma—ri, Ma—ri, Ma—ri." Peter chuckled with satisfaction and persevered, for this was a brave beginning. With a slow, waving forefinger, and a solemn nod of his head at each syllable, he pointed to his brother-in-law, and pronounced "'Zekiel." And now the girl smiled broadly, and his second success was equal to his first. Then, with his big hand flat upon his own blue jersey, he gave her, "Pe—ter," with slow distinctness, and she echoed the name without a hesitating letter; while Mary and 'Zekiel marvelled at the brilliance of the mind which could conceive such a notion, and felt many degrees more comfortable.

When Peter had finished this, his first lesson in

the intricacies of his mother-tongue, the stranger-girl rose from her chair, and smiling trustfully upon them all, tapped her own breast lightly with the broth spoon. "Teresa, Teresa, Te—re—sa," she said, turning from one to the other. And they repeated "Te—re—sa," with slow, clumsy tongues, till, apparently satisfied, she sank back into her chair with a pleased sigh and yielded her attention once more to her broth and to 'Zekiel's importunity.

For a while longer Peter looked at her, with his whole brain twisted to the shape of questions which could bring no answers; then he crossed to the window and looked thoughtfully out over the geraniums on the ledge to the storm-battered garden beyond. His heart was big enough to welcome half-a-hundred cast-aways into his home and give them pity for their hard lot, but it was the right and the wrong of the matter which began to trouble him.

"She'd fret herself mazed," he decided mournfully. "Cast out 'pon a strange spot, took to a strange house, and kept by a lot of strange folk; with no manner of means of goin' back home again! An' how can I set about her goin' back home again, when I don't so much as know her A B C? Law!" he declared awesomely, "Babel would have drove me mazed in no time."

Up the hill path towards the cottage two figures were

moving, an old man and a little girl, sauntering as folks will saunter in those parts of the land where timepieces are mainly kept for ornament, and the winding of them is considered as encouraging a reckless waste of mechanism. The old man had somewhat the look of an ascetic Romish priest, slender bodied and clean-shaven of face; but the old grey waterproof coat which he wore loose, its long skirts waving in the breeze, made a most unpriestlike garment, and the mild eyes and placid lines about the mouth pointed to a less severe creed than that of Rome. With one hand he now and again lifted his broad-brimmed hat from his brow, as if for ease and the play of the breeze; in the other hand he carried a little tin box. The child at his side was fair-faced and demure, and wore a cloak of grey duffel, hooded round her small grave features.

A particularly prolonged wave of the grey coat skirts caught Peter's wide abstracted gaze, and brought it back to a nearer focus, and, with the quickness of the man who knows the value of tide turns, he hurried out of the door and along the garden path to meet the wearer.

"Passon, sir," he appealed, "will 'ee be so good as to come 'fore to my house. I'm put about a brave bit over a matter of—of—jetsam."

The old man smiled, a mild, slow smile, as he turned in at the gate.

"Coastguarding brings its troubles to you, it seems, as well as to your natural enemies, the villains," he remarked. "Ursula, my dear, better follow me."

As he came in at the doorway the parson lifted his broad, soft hat.

'Good-day, Mary—I may still call her Mary, Peter? Good-day, 'Zekiel. Ah!——" With the intuition of the man who has lived among wrecks and finds no cargo surprising, his eyes fell on Teresa. "The wreckage, Peter?" he queried. Then, bowing to the stranger with a certain courtliness, "Good-day, madam," he said.

"Passon," declared Peter, "that's what I wanted to tell 'ee about. Her don't know what you'm saying. Her can't make 'ee out. Her can't make none of us out when we talks to her. Her's foreign, sir."

"Ah! indeed, indeed. Poor maid! poor maid! But I have heard nothing of a wreck; no sound awoke me, no word reached me."

Teresa gave her empty basin and spoon into 'Zekiel's hands, and resting her dark head on the cushions of Peter's chair, looked up with smiling interest at the parson's mouth as he shaped his words.

"No, sir, there wasn' no wreck," said Peter. "'Zekiel can tell 'ee the story best, for 'Zekiel was there to see it. To my mind it's a black bit of business."

"I can tell 'ee what I seed, sir," cried 'Zekiel,

turning to the parson, "but I can't tell 'ee why 'twas done."

His hands clenched themselves unconsciously as he recalled the work of the morning. Ursula stepped softly to the cradle side, where Zel—left for the first time without an audience—was keeping up a continuous murmur of soft, sleepy protests. Teresa turned her eyes from the parson's mouth to 'Zekiel's, and all waited for the "black" story.

"I was standing on the cliff," he went on, "looking out towards the Dinnis Rock. There was a bit of mornin' mist about, but, as far as eye could see, there wasn' a sail, or a mast, or an oar above water. Then, all to once, through the mist, there showed out a big, ugly-looking black ship; an' so curious-looking she was I called out to Mary, an' we watched her together."

The parson laid his little tin box on the table and crossed one forefinger on the other as he listened. Ursula had sunk on her knees by the cradle, and was rocking it gently as she smoothed Zel Ludgven's fat arm, he having merged his protests into dream-coos. The others looked at 'Zekiel's tense face and waited, as he paused before the thought of the ship's ugly work.

"Soon," he went on, "she slid out of the fog an' came runnin' in, closer than ever I've seed a vessel run in before, an' her crew cast anchor an' lowered a boat.

An' then, up from somewhere down below, they dragged this poor maid, an' all cryin', an' sobbin', an' strugglin' as she was, they hauled her down into the boat an' held her there, gripped as if she'd been a wild thing. An' so they pulled for Averack Cove. An' when I'd a-thought they was goin' to land an' ask help from Landecarroch for some poor mazed soul, they dragged her up from the bottom of the boat an' heaved her on to the shingle as if she'd a-been a log. An' when she rose an' cried for help an' mercy they beat her down again, an' then they pulled away from Averack beach with never a word for her, nor a morsel of food, nor a penny-piece. An' the faces of 'em was gashly. An' I ran down the cliff path more as if I was flyin', an' there I found the maid, an'——" the anger slid out of his voice suddenly and his words slowed into an unconscious, spoken caress, "an' she wasn' no mazed woman at all."

"Dear me! dear me!" murmured the parson dreamily. "These signs of racial——"

"An' the ship?" asked Peter, with sudden recollection of his calling.

"When I looked up again," said 'Zekiel, with a certain shamefacedness in his truth-telling, "the fog had a-dropped to the very breakers, an' the boat an' the ship was gone."

"Most curious! Most curious!" remarked the parson.

"And tell me, Ezekiel, were there no points in the vessel's rigging, or in the dress or bearing of the crew by which you could determine the nationality?"

"No, sir, I didn' never seem to have seen the like before."

"It is a curious and interesting study," mused the parson aloud, as he clasped his thin hands beneath his coat skirts and slowly paced the small kitchen, "the different forms, and lines, and curves by which the different countries betray their several tastes, and traits, and progress in civilisation. The opulent East, for instance, displaying in everything, from its architecture to its most trivial manufacture, those curves——"

"Curves!" interrupted 'Zekiel hotly, "they was devils!"

The parson started from his musings. "Devils are not without curves," he affirmed, with his mild smile, "if all we are told is true. If," he continued, turning to Teresa, "the maiden would speak again, I might gather from her accents some hint of her nationality, or from the formation of her words some clue to the race from which she springs. But I fear she will not use a language with which I am familiar."

"Teresa, Teresa," said Peter, appealing to the girl, "talk to the parson some; do 'ee now, co'."

"Madam," ventured the parson, "I would ask you to speak a few words to me."

The girl looked from one to the other. Then, seeing that they waited as for an answer to a question, she broke once more into her quick, soft syllables, smiling the while, until her long, black eyes were almost closed.

"Ah," sighed the parson, smiling back indulgently in the face of it, "it is neither Greek, nor Latin, nor Hebrew; nor is it, I conjecture, of Teutonic origin. In all probability the maiden is of Gaelic extraction. It is a curious and interesting fact," he continued, turning his gentle eyes on Peter, "that to a close student of the races there would be but slight difficulty in classifying the nationality of ninety out of a hundred human beings, by a short, I might almost say a cursory, observation of the features. To my but imperfectly trained eye this maiden in question appears to have more kinship with the southern European peoples—say Italy, or Spain, or Portugal—than with any African or Asiatic tribes."

"'Tis a pity for her, poor thing!" murmured Mary, "to be so far from home."

But 'Zekiel looked at the girl with no agreement in his eyes.

"In the course of the coming week," continued the



parson, "I shall be travelling into Haliggan on a small matter of research, and, while there, I will endeavour to meet with some person fluent in foreign languages who could give us aid. In the meanwhile if I, myself, can relieve or aid in any way, come, or send, without hesitation to the Parsonage, and I shall be pleased to do all in my power."

"Thank 'ee, passon, thank 'ee," replied Peter, knowing well the honesty underlying the old man's formal words.

"Of the perpetrators of the unholy deed we will say but little at present; the sin is theirs and will not go unpunished; but a sharp look-out when the fog has cleared somewhat more, and as full communication as is possible along the coast, might, perchance, accelerate that punishment. Meanwhile, my grand-daughter and I will continue our walk to the cairn, where we were taking a few tools and a frugal meal with us." He beamed, as he lifted his little tin box from the table. "If, as I have long suspected, there should be tracing or inscription at the base of the cross beside it, the rains of last night will have served to assist me in my search."

"You'll pardon my stoppin' 'ee, sir," said Peter.

"I am pleased, Peter, pleased that you did so. A father to my people first, an antiquarian afterwards, is

what I would be; and this is a most curious and interesting incident. Good-day! good-day. Ursula, my dear, we will proceed upon our way."

Ursula, lifting her sober little face from the cradle, met Mary's grateful, troubled eyes, and blushed at the thought of her own monopoly of younger Ludgven, then, rising from her knees, she smiled gently on them all, and, with a half-fearful glance at the stranger-girl, followed the parson out into the sunshine again.

When the garden gate had closed with its customary click the husband and wife each looked into the face of the other.

"What do 'ee think of it, Mary?" asked Peter, seeing the new anxiety in Mary's eyes as they two stood apart by the little flower-bedecked window.

"I dunno, Peter, I dunno. 'Twas a wicked business, sure enough; but her eyes burn so queer; an' look at our 'Zekiel, he's like another creature!"

Peter, turning to look again at the couple by the hearth, saw 'Zekiel, the boisterous, outspoken, light-hearted fisher-boy, kneeling grave-faced and compassionate before the stranger-girl lying back languorously in the big chair, more as a knight of the Middle Ages paying homage to his lady, than a clumsy village boy striving to discover, without the aid of language,

whether or no the pile of peat and gorse blazed too fiercely for the maid's comfort.

"She's got a mortal pretty face—a mortal pretty face," said Peter slowly. "An' our 'Zekiel's struck down by her black eyes," he added, with a laugh. "To my mind he's fairly mazed about the maid already. But don't 'ee fret, my dear, he'll be right again afore his beard's full grown." Yet his own eyes grew suddenly serious. "'Tis truth, she's got a mortal pretty face," he murmured, as he turned away towards the door.

Mary knew that he spoke truly; the girl's fairness was beyond denial. But a load lay at her heart, unanalysed, scarcely realised, but a load, nevertheless; and she turned away from the maid's fair face, and bent over her cradle and sighed a heavy sigh.

And 'Zekiel and the stranger, in the shine of the glowing peats, looked and smiled and went on looking, and found an eloquence in silence.

## CHAPTER V.

'Z EKIEL was mazed.

For the first time, since the red cow from Trelean church-town felt enterprise and walked eleven miles to sup on Landecarroch cabbages, the village was of one mind; and its one mind declared that 'Zekiel Myners was mazed. Peter had said it that first day when he looked across his kitchen at the boy and the girl beside his hearth and saw them smiling upon each other, but he went his way and awaited the recovery with good-humoured tolerance. The fisher-boys agreed with Peter, and they laughed loudly and they jested freely when the knowledge came upon them, for 'Zekiel's whole-heartedness had been a weekly affront to them. Countless were the Sunday afternoons he had sat with his fellows on the bit of cob wall by the "look-out," the corner round which all the lovers passed on their way to Ten-Men's-Mound, there to decorate the hillocks with their several presences, and do their weekly wooing till

the time was come to pass down again and think of sustenance ; and, on these countless Sunday afternoons, he had watched his line of company slide off one by one, some shamefacedly, some with a gallant air, to meet a maid and swell the irregular double file which slowly climbed the hill ; and he had flung banter at their heels as he turned to sprawl more at ease on the space which they had left, and had found ample entertainment in his own thoughts or in the company of the one or two lovers who chanced to be unmatched or forsaken for the while. Now they found consolation in his surrender, and they watched and enjoyed his worship of the strange maid who draped her body in outlandish garments and spoke no single word clear to their understanding. But the jests were kindly, and they also waited for the end of the mazedness, for with them these love-fevers usually ran a course, and the course was not limitless.

Mary Ludgven, too, saw 'Zekiel's mazedness, but she saw in it more than the common lad's love-sickness. To her eyes the boy seemed to be as one lying under a spell. She saw his face grow old ; she saw the lines drawn deeper and deeper about his mouth by the sharp point of his passion ; she saw his unrest, and the hunger which starved the old content from his eyes ; she felt that he was bowing heart and soul before the witcheries from

which she could only shrink, and the worship seemed unnatural and horrible to her as the worship of a child for some vile god.

And 'Zekiel—'Zekiel did not dally to find a softer word than "mazedness." "Mazedness" was as good a word as "love," as he had learned to recognise love in the pranks and ponderous gambollings of the pairs who rounded the corner by the "look-out" on Sunday afternoons. If that poor, common preference was "love," "love" was no word for the wonderful thing which was overfilling his heart—the tearing pain, the blazing joy, which was no mere mad South passion crushing down obstacles, nor the dogged affection of a Northerner, plodding, and bearing, and hoping; it was neither, with the elements of both. A great, clear, fierce fire, scorching and comforting, dropping balm on his heart as it seared it, forcing a great, voiceless cry from his soul; a passion restrained, a longing held back by reverence, a worship fired by impulse; an overwhelming, unutterable, incomparable force, which he joyed in, and endured, and suffered, and hugged close in his big, boyish heart, and would not have parted with if he could.

The emotion had its drawbacks. It was even apt to harass the mortal who inspired it; while, as to the scene in which it was lived through, that spot became

haunted by a spirit of discomfort and unrest, and the dwellers in it in time chafed under the innovation, and could give but scant sympathy; for they brought common-sense to bear upon the agitation, with the result that it received but a small meed of toleration while it stirred the present. The haze of time was needed to tone down the recollection of the discomfort and bring a mild compassion.

So 'Zekiel, to friends and kinsfolk, was simply "mazed 'bout the furrin' maid"; and they looked at his haggard face and thought and called him "fool for his pains." For all this 'Zekiel cared nothing. Teresa was the world for him; nothing else mattered—nothing, except the language which balked him and shut him from her understanding; and, with a fine courage, he faced that, and set himself the task of teaching the words which should draw the girl close to him by-and-bye.

"Speak to me, sweetheart. Speak with me heart to heart."

That was 'Zekiel's prayer, but for two months he did not utter it, though through every minute of those two months he craved desperately to hear plain English words from the girl's tongue, and see the light of understanding in her eyes; and the desire gripped at his throat sometimes, almost choking him, and his own

heart grew over-big with all that he would say to her. But the pain was useless ; it accomplished nothing. He had no charmed wand to strike his own words with a soft blow upon her understanding. It could only be brought about slowly and by labour. So he strove to crush his heart back to some degree of patience ; and, every day when work was done, he would change his sea-stained clothes for his bettermost homespun and jersey, and, leaving his little lodgment under Betty Higgins' eaves, would climb the hill to Peter Ludgven's cottage, where Teresa was still sheltered, that he might struggle on with the teaching of his own broad syllables to her lilting tongue. And the pleasure of it ! The gladness of a new word mastered—a whole sentence achieved ! Each word was a separate victory. But even into the midst of the triumph there would creep the heart-sickness, and the craving for the time of her proficiency.

Teresa, looking so often into her teacher's eyes, must have learned from them that other knowledge, too—the teaching he forced back from his tongue—but she did not resent it and she did not check it. Week after week she took his time, and his labour, and his homage, and gave him smiles for payment. Week after week, too, she lived placidly on Peter Ludgven's bounty, without a question or a scruple, content, too, to all seeming,



until, as time passed by, the autumn sun passed with it, and each chilly day became a trial, and she shivered, and her red lips drooped pathetically. Mary, seeing this, pitied her, and piled peats on her hearth in reckless fashion, and hoped for a merciful winter; soon, too, she forsook her cushioned chair by the ingle, and spoke of the greater comfort of a straight-backed chair when one must needs rock a cradle. So Teresa rested her languid limbs on Mary's cushions before the warmth of Mary's creating, and Mary took some comfort to herself from this small straining of the truth. She felt that it was good to be able to perform some tangible bit of hospitality; it eased the compunction in her heart, and softened her self-reproach that she could not take kindly to the maid whom 'Zekiel had set his heart upon.

"Speak with me, sweetheart! Speak with me heart to heart!"

It was on a grey, misty November afternoon that 'Zekiel spoke his prayer aloud, and then poured out a torrent of quick, passionate love words, most of which were still meaningless to the girl. But Teresa was pettish and shivering that day. There was a touch of east in the wind and the sky hung low over the sea; her blood ran slow and her temper was short; and when the boy put out his big hands to clasp hers she

frowned, and at his rough touch and the grasp of his hardened palm, she shrank back with a petulant cry of distaste. She had never been capricious with him before, and this freak came as a blow in the face to him. He looked at her with wonder-wide eyes, and all in absent-mindedness stroked her little hand again. At that second touch she sprang back in anger, and, catching up her shawl from the settle, she twined it about her hastily and ran from him out into the cold, damp air.

'Zekiel's heart contracted with a sharp pain. The girl's way humiliated him and cut him to the quick. For a moment he stood quite still and knew what despair meant, and faintly felt what it would mean for him if the girl went out of his life again. Then "'Tis her waywardness," he thought; "she isn' like Landecarrocks maidens, an' I wouldn' have her be." And he followed after her quickly that he might try to wipe out his offence.

She was running along the road towards the sea, flying fast before him, her dark hair blowing about her shoulders, her red shawl waving in the wind. Then up the cliff hill she turned, still fleet and unwavering, until she reached the turfy level, the spot where 'Zekiel had stood to watch the black ship and her crew the morning after the storm. Here she stopped, breathless, panting,

with the colour flooding in her cheeks, and 'Zekiel came up to her and took her gently by the arm to ask forgiveness for his unknown fault. But she still shrank from his touch, and turned from him, and looked away towards the sea. Then there came back to him the remembrance of the day when she had first come into his life, when he had first set eyes upon her and held her in his arms.

"What did it mean?" he thought wildly. "Why did they serve her so?"

Teresa, too, turned her eyes from the horizon back to Averack beach and shivered, and, looking at her, 'Zekiel saw in her face something which was new to him.

"Tell me of it!" he cried, pointing down to the shingle where the black boat had grounded. "Tell me of the devils who served 'ee so."

Many of his words were clear to her, and the pleading maddened her; she only remembered the desertion, not the welcome, and she hated the remembrance. She turned on the boy furiously; her brows lowered and grew ugly, and she pushed him from her. "No, no, no!" she cried, and her voice was not quite tuneful now. "No, no, no!" Then she flung away from him again and ran, hurrying and stumbling, down the hill she had but just climbed. And her face was ablaze with anger and her eyes blinded by her rage-tears.

"He is cruel! He drives me mad!" she cried, breaking into her own passionate mother-tongue. "He will not have me forget! He will never have me forget!"

Then, suddenly, came back an echo to her ears—an echo of her angry words. "He will never have me forget! He will never have me forget!" And then came a short, pleasant laugh, and then a question:

"Is remembrance so terrible, signorina?"

Teresa, rushing along with tear-blinded eyes, in her heedless rage saw nothing but a sudden, indistinct figure which seemed to rise before her, and then she felt a shock which sent her reeling. Putting out her hands to save herself she found them held by other hands, and then an arm steadied her as she was wheeling to the ground. The hands were firm, the arm was muscular, the voice was cheerful, and hands, arm, and voice belonged to a man—a young man—and the manner of his support was close and sturdy. In another moment Teresa was safe and her footing sure, and the tears were on her cheeks now, leaving her eyes clear, but she still clung to the strong arm.

"You are from Spain?" she panted excitedly. "You know my language! You are one of us!"

"I am from Spain," the young man answered, smiling carelessly into her eager face, "and I know your language, but I am not one of you."

"But you are a friend in this icy land of strangers," she insisted. "You have felt the sun ; you have seen a blue sky. You can warm my cold heart with words, and melt for me the chill of these sullen persons and their black days."

"I can do many things," he answered lightly, "when I have learned why Spanish maids come tumbling from the very skies into my arms. 'Tis a new fashion in Landecarroch since I last lived here."

She listened to his careless, laughing words mocking her eagerness, but the arm was still holding her, and the hold was firm. She sighed a deep sigh then, part of self-pity for her own past loneliness, part of pleasure in the consolation here close to her—a fellow-creature who smiled on her, and understood her, and who could admire even while he mocked.

Then to them both came 'Zekiel, with his nostrils strained and his hair dishevelled by the wind, and halting suddenly, as if shocked into stillness, he looked from Teresa to the man, with hunted eyes. It was then that the stranger slowly loosened the arm which held the girl, and, looking with laughing eyes at 'Zekiel, greeted him with an outstretched hand.

"'Zekiel, 'Zekiel, is this what you have been doing while I have been a-roaming? Hunting poor Spanish maidens till they rush to the very arms of strangers

for protection? Ah, 'Zekiel, you have, in good truth, been growing quickly, while I have been but dreaming of it."

"Master Humphrey! Back home again! Spanish maiden!" gasped 'Zekiel. "Is it true, Master Humphrey? Is she sure enough a Spanish maiden?"

"Spanish, I vow, by the colour and tongue of her. But we Englishmen must learn to forget old battles in these days; we must bury old quarrels, and forswear chasing Spaniards now. And a woman, too, 'Zekiel! To chase a woman! Lord, what a change in English manners!"

"I didn' go for to do it, Master Humphrey. 'Tis true we hold no great love for the Spaniard, but I didn' go for to chase the maid with any manner of hate towards her, rather ——" 'Zekiel coloured hotly, and, after trying to face the laughing eyes, flinched, and looked upon the ground.

"Rather with a manner of—of *love*, 'Zekiel? Folks say we have strange ways of proving our devotion here in these parts, and, forsooth, you seem to have found a way of your own. At times, 'tis said, we're slow, with but ice where blood should be; but of such faults I'll hold you innocent, I swear. And the maid herself, does she approve this fashion for the storming of her heart?"

"The maid!—the maid!" cried 'Zekiel in his pain; "the maid's hard put to it to make out so much as a word I say. 'Tis like to a great stone wall, that foreign talk of hers. I've a-bruised my very heart an' soul in tryin' to pull it down; an' how can *I*, just a fisher-boy, climb over it?"

"'Love! love! love! Love will find out the way,'" sang Master Humphrey.

But there lay no manner of comfort in platitudes for 'Zekiel. Only a new pain was born to him as he turned towards Teresa and saw her, still flushed and panting, with her eager eyes fastened on Master Humphrey's face.

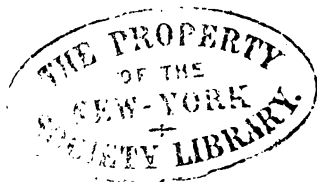
"Teresa!" cried 'Zekiel, with a sharp note of anguish in his voice.

But Teresa did not move; it was as if she did not hear him.

"Teresa," Master Humphrey repeated softly in her own Southern words, "Teresa—a gleaner; 'tis a pleasant name."

And Teresa drew near to him, as if he had commanded her, and she laid her hands upon his arm as a little child would lay them, and her eyes still showed her pleasure.

Master Humphrey looked back at her in silence for a moment, and then he laughed amusedly, as one



who realises that he it is who makes the third of a trio.

"Good-day, good-day!" he cried. "This is my fine fashion of hurrying to the Parsonage as I promised Dame Tellam I would. I must see you all again soon, 'Zekiel, and hear Landecarrocks tidings."

And 'Zekiel stood and watched him go, and then he moaned; and to look forward seemed a blank and dreary work. Then he turned to Teresa, and he saw that she, too, was looking after Master Humphrey; and her eyes were shining and held a look that made him wince and draw his breath back over his lip, as children do when they cut themselves and will not cry.

"Come 'long home," he pleaded, with the sharp pain-note still in his voice. "Come 'long home, co'." He knew that he must move her eyes from that comely figure strolling up the hill, or he should speak some mad words; and a senseless, great tremor of relief shook him when she stirred and slowly faced him. There was no anger for him in her eyes now, but he knew that the satisfaction which lay in them was none of his causing. And it was in silence that they turned and walked side by side back to Peter Ludgven's hearth,



## CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Master Humphrey reached that point of the hill where the road branched off to the Parsonage, he turned and looked back at 'Zekiel and the girl—two distance-dwarfed figures walking, with a wide space between them along the level, past Ann Vitty's fuchsia bush—and the sight, in some undefined way, made him feel suddenly older than he need have felt, and seemed to show no reason for the feeling. In the three years which had passed since Master Humphrey had grown weary of his loneliness and had started on his travels, 'Zekiel, it was true, seemed to have grown from slings, and surreptitious games of span-farthing, to be sweetheart-high, and, in the sight of this growth, may have lain the explanation of Master Humphrey's consciousness of age. Be that as it might, when he turned after a while and faced the hill again, a thoughtful mood had fallen upon him. He walked slowly, and when he reached the low wall round

about the churchyard, he stopped and rested there, in the face of all Dame Tellam's wishes, and looked reflectively across the bare, wind-swept spot.

Daniel Laskey was tending graves a little way off, bowing over his work with the obeisance which seventy years is apt to force upon the shape. Master Humphrey's eyes rested compassionately on the old man, and he realised that Daniel, too, had grown older, though the churchyard in which he toiled and spent his strength, keeping it neat and prim as a bride would keep her best room, was scarcely fuller than it had been three years before. On a flat tombstone, hard by Daniel, sat another figure—a big, unshapely man, with a loose, smiling mouth, who played with knuckle-bones, and broke the damp, grey silence with an occasional foolish laugh, according to the interest of the game. This was Sam'le Laskey, Daniel's son, aged fifty-two. And Master Humphrey, watching him as he played so foolishly and so contentedly upon the old lichened slab, saw that Sam'le, at least, had grown no older with the years that had passed, and a new pity for Daniel stirred in him, for Master Humphrey had lived three travelled years since last he had looked upon father and son, and he had begun to understand some of the hard things which may befall a man. And he pulled a dried grass stem and chewed it

absently as he contemplated the two at their ordinary game of life.

There was an old tale told in Landecarroch, that, when Daniel Laskey had been a boy, he had gone away and married a girl who had died before her "teens" had power to weary her. But Daniel never told the tale himself; he only came quietly back to Landecarroch with a silly-faced baby in his arms, long before he had turned twenty, and, renting the cottage down by the boat-sheds, bought a cradle and a few odd things, and settled himself again upon his native soil, being recognised as a widow-man from that day.

For more than fifty years since then he had worked from early Monday till late Saturday, and had kept food and firing in the house, enough for two; but if the villagers expected Daniel to lavish love upon his heir, they were disappointed, for Daniel Laskey and Sam'le, his son, walked separate ways from the time of Sam'le's "feeling his feet," and were never seen to interchange a word in pleasantness or in wrath as far back as any one could stir a memory. Landecarroch folks supposed that Daniel provided clothing for Sam'le, because Sam'le wore clothing, and, undoubtedly, he did not provide it for himself, having never done a stroke of work in his life, except once or twice in mistake for

play; but no one ever saw the purchase made (which is saying much for Daniel's secretiveness), and Daniel kept his own counsel. Sam'le, it is true, had sometimes been questioned on the matter in his younger days, but, as he told a different tale to each questioner—thereby causing some friction in the village until the questioners had come together and aired their authority and faced its value—they remain mystified.

It was Sam'le's way to hover about his father as he worked, at such times as the rest of the village had gone a-fishing out at sea, but this seemed to be because he hated solitude, not because he was affectionate. And Daniel bore with him in silence; and only once in all the fifty-odd years—on that summer Sunday evening when Sam'le inadvertently loosed all the boats from their moorings while the village was at worship, and came with slack lips and mildly wondering eyes to the church to tell of it—only on that one occasion had Daniel been known to volunteer a word on the subject of his son.

“‘He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow; and the father of a fool hath no joy,’” he said grimly, as he stood by the water and watched the men chasing their boats round the point by means of Builder Belovely's great smack; then he spat as though the taste in his mouth was bitter, and then he turned and went into his

cottage, leaving Sam'le to the mercy of the boatmen on their return, and the womenkind meanwhile.

Master Humphrey smiled as the old tale drifted through his mind ; then, after a while, having no graves to tend or knuckle-bones to play with, he grew chilly in the raw air and rose to go upon his way. But at that moment, round the corner of the church came a tall, lean figure, carrying a plummet in one hand, and a note-book in the other, and Master Humphrey cleared the hedge at a bound and hurried forward to meet it.

"Parson," he cried, with all his cheerfulness returning, "I was wanting you ; I was on my way to you. Say you're glad to see me home again !"

Parson Swayn, dropping his plummet and misplacing his index-finger in his note-book, gripped the hand held out to him, and beamed upon the young man.

"Humphrey ! my dear Humphrey ! I almost imagine that my eyes must be deceiving me ! Truly, I am overjoyed to see you home once again. But so sudden, so unpretentious a return ! I have heard no word of the expectation——"

"All my fault, sir, all my fault, and I have had to bear much scolding for it," confessed Master Humphrey. "To tell truth, I turned babyish, and all suddenly wanted my home. The longing gripped me as I stood

one morning in the busy street of a dirty Spanish town, and I turned about and came swiftly as sails and horses could bring me. 'Twas but at dawn this morning that I galloped in at my own gates and shocked half Dame Tellam's love away by the sudden and undignified manner of it. She, it was, who commanded me to come and report myself to my parson; for the thought of Squire Humphrey Harle being in Landecarroch after three years roaming, and no one a whit more awed or the wiser for it, was gall and wormwood to the old lady."

"Something more than Dame Tellam's urgings brought you up the hill, I trust," ventured the parson, smiling his gentle smile.

"That's truth, sir, for I was eager to look on you and the little maid, Ursula; and I gladly left the dame in peace to move the linen coverings from the chairs and tables (her true reason for sending me upon my way, I told her), that I might come to set my own eyes upon you both. How does little Ursula fare, parson?"

"Little Ursula is little Ursula no longer, in one sense of the word," replied the parson. "'Tis true she is of small and delicate growth, but, remember, she has slipped from twelve to fifteen years since last you saw her. You will find us older, Humphrey—all

older. And——” he added, with a smile, half-humorous, half-pathetic, “we tend toward antiquatedness without gaining interest as antiquities.”

“The antiquatedness is more to my taste,” protested Master Humphrey.

“Boy, thou wert ever a Vandal. But come, I will not entertain my guest entirely upon common ground. We will go to my room where, no doubt, we shall find the little housekeeper, Ursula, who will give us a cup of her China tea-drink for our refreshment.”

The “parson’s room,” to which he led Master Humphrey, was the pride of Landecarroch. Every man in the village—not to speak of some women and children—felt that he, or she, had helped to make it what it was. And they knew that it was like no other room in the land. The first stone of it had been placed, under the parson’s watchful eyes, one year, long ago, when the village had been mourning under the stress of storm and wreck, and the very fish had deserted the sea; and the village blessed the parson, and went to work with fresh hearts strengthening their unskilled hands. And the parson stood by them with a treasure destined for every inch, and a tale for every treasure. And every Landecarroch man straightened his back and felt proud when he looked upon it finished, for it is not given to all men to

accomplish fine art in the intervals of fish-catching, and the experiment was new enough to be altogether pleasant; nor was there any carping art critic to be reckoned with in those days and parts, to take the bloom from the plum of their content.

On the outside, the parson's room was but a rough, twelve-sided building, made of unshaped granite blocks, with lancet windows and a domed roof. But it was on the inside that the parson and his men looked and felt proud; for there was gathered together all the treasures of stone, and marble, and gold, and gem which the parson himself had sought for, or bargained for, or accumulated; and the twelve walls and the domed roof were encrusted with beauty. Round the base of the building the coarser treasures were placed—granite slabs with strange inscriptions, crosses and carved stones dug from the earth or saved from an extreme destiny in the walls of pig-styes or cow-sheds. Above these shone marbles and porphyries of wonderful colour and fine polish; and from these again rose a rainbow-like glitter of quartz, and spar, and gem, and mineral, from jetty black to dazzling white, from royal purple to delicate amethyst, from deepest emerald to palest sea-green, from an umber which glowed to a sparkling amber, with gold and silver, tin and copper, corals and fossils, flints and



shells, diamonds which had lain in the Cornish earth, and amethysts which had lain by the Cornish sea. And they glittered, and flashed, and gleamed in sunlight by day and in the light of the big lamp which hung from the roof by night.

To Ursula, who had grown up in it, this room seemed no wonder; it was beautiful, indeed, but she knew of many such in another land. The land in question, however, was fairyland, and of such a spot the parson and his men knew no geography. But with these twelve wonderful walls around her, and the wild, lonely land outside, Ursula found it no hard matter to live half her life in fairyland and weave fresh tales to meet her limitations.

On this November afternoon she sat on a straight-backed oak chair before the hearth, with a little table beside her on which were set the cups and saucers—white delf, blue starred—which had served for her dolls before those treasures were laid in the old chest for a long, long sleep some years ago, but which now served for the China tea which she and the parson drank together every afternoon.

Ursula looked less of a child now than on that day when the Spanish girl had come to Peter Ludgven's cottage. The big duffel cloak had hidden the air of womanliness which became her so well, and the hood

had covered the soft fair hair drawn lightly back from her dreamy little face. To-day, as she sat waiting in the firelight beside her tea-table, she looked so serious and demure in her little grey gown with the white 'kerchief about her shoulders, that the parson seemed right in assuring Master Humphrey that she was "little Ursula" no longer. She was dreaming of the ways and the doings of that gracious, glorious land—that land which was not Arabia, nor Persia, nor India, nor Algeria, which was like them all, rich, gorgeous, tropical, and yet different, more fanciful, nebulous, unreal—which was, in fact, fairyland. She was wondering in what manner the chief of all those imaginary, yet intensely real, personages, the gallant hero-fairy prince-knight, would sail to Landecarrook—for that he would reach those shores in due time, she felt sure—when the door opened, and Agrimony, her little maid, put in her curly head.

"Mistress Ursula, if you please, the pot boils, and the master is nearing home with a stranger by his side." And Agrimony's face was wreathed in smiles.

"A stranger!" exclaimed Mistress Ursula, starting from her day-dream, and flushing quickly at the rare news of such a coming, seeming, as it did, to answer to her wonderings. "A stranger! Of what——"

But Agrimony was gone, and her little mistress

stood with her hands clasped and her breath coming fast, waiting for the coming of the unknown.

"Ursula, dear child, I have brought a stranger to you," announced the parson, as he crossed the room followed by Master Humphrey.

The colour flooded Ursula's face, and for a moment she closed her eyes in her exquisite agitation. When, however, she looked up and saw the laughing face she knew so well, a great disappointment shook her, and her voice held the vibration as she faltered: "Humphrey!"

But at once, on the shock of the pain, came the shock of the pleasure. The real event was so good, the imaginary could wait, and "Humphrey!" she cried again, all-joyous.

"I think you were not glad to see me, Mistress Ursula?" ventured Master Humphrey.

"Oh yes, indeed, indeed," she protested; then, in strict truthfulness added, "now."

"Did you look to see some other friend?"

"I looked," she faltered. "I looked to see——" Then she met the laughing eyes again and pride gave her courage. "I can wait for others; there is time enough for any other," she declared with a pretty gravity. "It is you whom I know I am glad to see."

Agrimony, bringing in the pot, set it on the hearth, and handed the little inlaid tea chest to Mistress Ursula whose little hands were trembling. And Agrimony noted the trembling, and she noted also the light in Master Humphrey's eyes as he looked at his playfellow and realised that twelve and three make fifteen. And then Agrimony passed out again into the passage-way which led to the house itself, and being there, she laughed softly, yet merrily. But Agrimony was often laughing when there seemed but small reason for the act.

## CHAPTER VII.

"MASTER HUMPHREY'S home agen!" 'Zekiel announced that same evening, as he sat at his sister's ingle and looked into the red heart of the peat-clods.

"Master Humphrey—home!" repeated Mary Ludgven amazed. "Goodness me! Then 'twas sudden, I'll be bound, for I saw Dame Tellam down to Pecket's farm only yesterday forenoon, an' she didn' make no mention of it." She was sitting on a low, wooden chair beside Teresa, with Zel on her lap, curling his bare toes in the warmth of the fire, his day garments all slack about him, buttons and strings being allowed some relaxation in view of the imminence of bed-time. "Poor young gentleman!" she went on musingly. "I often think 'tis a lonesome life for him down in that great empty house, not a soul of his own family to care whether he's livin' or dyin', an' all his fine friends enjoyin' of themselves far away from these parts."

"He'd best marry," said 'Zekiel, "if 'tis company

he's wantin'. And 'twould be a good thing for Lande-carrock as well as for himself."

"He's a bit young to marry and settle yet awhile, I'm thinkin'," Mary hazarded.

"A bit young! No one's too young who's a mind to it an' a-plenty to live on." 'Zekiel's voice was protesting, and his eyes left the peat flame which had seemed to hold them, and rested on Teresa's face as she sat opposite to him with the firelight glancing on her, now lighting her with a red shine and again leaving her indistinct in shadow.

"'Tis true the old squire was but a boy when he married," allowed Mary, "an' he was happy enough, folks say, but I'm thinkin' Master Humphrey is made of different stuff to what the old squire was, with a likin' to see the world in his own way."

"To my mind, a young squire with money, an' wits, an' a great empty house, an' a sight of people on his land, ought to get married," declared 'Zekiel hotly.

"You'm set on havin' the young master settled," laughed Mary, as she gently smoothed Zel's feet and looked into the blaze.

And 'Zekiel drew back into the shadow of the settle-arm, for he knew that his face was eager with his words. He knew, too, that Master Humphrey's loneliness and

his people's comfort were nothing to him then ; but the squire's face was handsome, and his own heart was heavy.

"I'm thinkin'," spoke Mary slowly, after a long pause, "that maybe Master Humphrey would be like to know the words that Teresa talks. He's travelled in a powerful sight of lands, folks say, and 'twould be a good thing for the poor maid to find some livin' soul to make known her troubles to. P'raps Peter might tell him 'bout the matter, for he's a kindly young gentleman to speak with, an' has a good heart with all his laughin' ways."

"He knows most tongues, I make no doubt," 'Zekiel agreed, with bitterness in his voice which was hateful to him but would not be curbed ; "he's got the luck, has Master Humphrey." But he did not tell Mary of that first meeting on the hill, somehow he could not fit the words to it. And then it seemed that the pause had made the telling impossible.

"My precious ! 'tis bye-low time," cooed Mary to her boy, as she caught him tightly to her and rocked him to and fro.

"I must be goin', too," said 'Zekiel, rising as he spoke.

"Goin' !" Mary exclaimed, turning to him in surprise ; for 'Zekiel's hours by her hearth had lengthened as

the days had shortened. "Whatever are 'ee goin' for?"

"Well," stammered 'Zekiel, "I dunno—but maybe—I'd best be off."

"Better bide till Peter comes," said Mary, pitying the pain on his face. Then she rose with Zel in her arms, and climbed slowly up the white wooden stairs humming a lullaby to her boy's drowsy objections as she went.

'Zekiel stood for a moment, irresolute, twisting his knitted cap, then he turned to Teresa and held out his hand to bid her good-night.

But Teresa's passion was over. Perhaps the new twist in her life had touched her with generosity, or perhaps she noted that, in the kindly firelight, 'Zekiel's face was wonderfully comely, and his roughness seemed but an admirable strength, or perhaps her selfish heart was penitent. Whichever reason held good, when 'Zekiel held his hand to her she caught it with both her own, and lifting her alluring face to him, all tender and petitioning, she drew him gently to the chair which Mary had left, and her warm fingers lingered about his own for a long moment after their sweet force had ceased. Then she smiled as a sorry child might smile, and then she turned from him and looked into the fire, pensive.

But 'Zekiel talked no more of leaving.



"What did I do to 'ee," he murmured passionately, "to make 'ee angry? I didn' think when I learned 'ee to say 'No,' that 'twould be for the like of that."

She turned to him again. "No? No?" she repeated slowly, with a question in each word. Then with an impulsive gesture she smoothed the hand she had shrunk from, and smiling graciously, "Ah! it will be 'Yes! Yes! Yes!'" she softly promised.

And the fire burned low and clear, and the knitted cap lay upon the floor, and the lullaby overhead grew fainter and fainter until it died away. And in the kitchen scarcely a word was spoken, but the girl's hand lay upon the boy's, and, in the glorious silence which fell for an unreckoned spell, the boy's still tongue recorded a more triumphant joy than shouts from a thousand throats could have told; and when Mary came softly down the stairs again from the crib of her sleeping boy, 'Zekiel had not yet said his "Good-night," the cut of its syllables would have murdered his short happiness—his exultation—the strength of which was no stronger than a girl's whim could shatter, the length no longer than the letter's difference between her "Yes" and "No."

Mary stood a while and looked from the shadow of the stairway across at the figures in the firelight, and the gaunt, eager-faced man seemed a stranger in her eyes, but the girl-child at his side made her shudder.

"Is the maid stealing all the youngness from his face for her own?" she thought wildly. "Is she flesh and blood same as us? Or is she some bewitched thing come in to us from the sea?" Then her own injustice lashed her. "Oh, 'tis me that's wicked! Poor maid! poor, friendless maid!"

"All in darkness you folks?" The voice was Peter's, coming in, cheerful and ordinary, with a rattle of the door latch and a clatter of his thick boots on the stones, striking at Mary's nervous fancies and bringing her thoughts back to common-sense and supper. So she moved quickly about her kitchen, with some answering cheerfulness, forcing back her fears as she lighted the candles and began to set the table. And Peter, after throwing a tangle of gorse upon the hearth, rested on the settle and spread his great hands to the blaze.

"An' how 'bout the lessons, 'Zekiel; do 'em go forward?" he asked with a sly chuckle.

'Zekiel leaned his chin on his hand and looked gravely into the leaping flame of Peter's raising. "'Tis a terrible thing is a foreign tongue," he answered slowly. "'Tis worse than oceans of water, or leagues of land, for gettin' to the other side of."

"I've a-heard," declared Peter with a laugh, "that 'tis bad for a teacher to go puttin' too much heart in his work; 'tis apt to clog the head."

"'Tis apt to break the heart, I'm thinkin'," murmured 'Zekiel.

"Master Humphrey's home, Peter," interrupted Mary, coming forward to lift a saucepan from the hearth.

"Yes, I've been a-talkin' with him," said Peter. "I met him on the hill a while ago, light-hearted as ever. He don't seem to sober down much with his travels, if we may go by the looks of him."

"We've been thinkin', 'Zekiel an' me," continued Mary, "that maybe he would be so kind as to speak with Teresa in her own words, an' hear what she's got to tell—all about where she comes from, an' who's her folks, an' the like of that—for, I make no doubt, he'll have an understandin' of what they talk over in those parts."

Peter looked across at Teresa with the laugh on his lips still, which had been spent, so far, on 'Zekiel; and Teresa, who caught the words "Master Humphrey," and remembered, knew that they were talking of the happy-faced stranger-man and of herself, and her eyes glowed as they met Peter's. The coastguard looked at her long and steadily and his face slowly changed and grew grave.

"'Tis a powerful pretty face!" he murmured, "a powerful pretty face! A man——" The words trailed off into silence, but still he sat and looked, and,

without stirring a muscle, the girl held his will, and her own eyes were inscrutable.

"Peter!" It was Mary's voice, low and trembling, as she saw the fixed look in her man's eyes, and, shuddering at the spell which seemed to lurk in the girl's lashes, came to lay her hand upon his shoulder. "Peter, come 'fore to supper now, my dear; 'tis all ready." And Peter's thoughts were too far away to hear that her voice was not the voice of a happy woman.

"P'raps Master Humphrey will be able to help her back home to her own folks——" she went on bravely, but a crash from 'Zekiel's fist upon the table slaughtered the end of her sentence, and brought Peter back to his senses.

"Hullo, 'Zekiel! What's wrong with you?"

"I didn' go for to do it," muttered 'Zekiel confusedly. "I wasn' thinkin'."

"You'm a bit heavy-handed when you'm light of mind, then. What was you a-saying', Mary, before he let his fingers fall?"

"That maybe Master Humphrey would be able to help Teresa to get back home to her own folks."

"Maybe he would," Peter agreed quietly, "an'—— maybe 'twould be for the best that she should go, poor young maid! Come," he added, in his own

cheerful voice, as he roused himself, and rose from the settle, "let's get to supper. I'm mortal hungry. Come, 'Zekiel, draw 'fore your chair; we'll give 'ee the run of your teeth to-night, if you've a mind to try the power of 'em."

'Zekiel drew forward his chair at Peter's bidding, but the "run of his teeth" that night was inconsiderable. His hunger lay in his heart, and, in such a case, it is the guest who pays the price, not the host.

When 'Zekiel had at last said "Good-night," and had closed the door between himself and Teresa's re-born graciousness, he turned to the dim, still night, and the keen air seemed to whip at his eyelids and wake him from a dream. He stood still and bore it for a while and then he turned and walked slowly down the hill. But when he neared Betty's cottage it seemed impossible that he should go in, and shut himself between four little walls, and make-believe that he wanted to sleep. The imprisonment looked hateful as he thought of it, and he felt as if he should never sleep again. Instead of walking on down the street, he passed along by the back garden, and then struck upwards, and climbed the cliff hill until he stood again where he and Teresa had stood that afternoon.

"What's the good of it all?" he questioned, and his boy-heart seemed bursting with his passion and despair as he flung himself down on the short grass. "What's to be the end of it all! Can a man fall on the ground and pray a maid to give herself to him when he can't so much as give her the time of day in words plain to her understandin'? Why did she ever come nigh these parts? Why did I go down the cliff an' look upon her face?" Then he paused, for the passion in his heart beat at his throat as if to stun the words for traitors.

But, in time, solitude and the night helped the boy to be more god-like. As he lay there, with the great dark dome over him, and the slow "plash! plash!" of the sea sounding in his ears, the pain ebbed away from him, as if drawn by the out-going tide, leaving only an indistinct sadness as its scar. For many minutes he lay there with his brain empty of thought, either of trouble or joy—a motionless body with a blanched mind—only conscious that, in the wash of the waves there was a great peace, and that to move might be to bring back pain.

So the minutes passed away and he feared to stir.

It was the bark of a dog which roused him at last, and he sat up and gripped his hands round his knees,

and waited for the back flow of the misery; but in mercy the turn of that tide was slow. He was feeling the soothing, the wonderful great peace, which lies in the hollow of the hand of Night, and his heart was as a palimpsest from which she had wiped the old pain-words away, and on which, for a while at least, were written only letters spelling patience and a wonderful gratitude.

"I'm glad she came," he thought slowly. "I was lyin' when I said I wasn'. I'm glad she came; an' I'm glad 'twas me as first went to her. I've a-held her in my arms, an'——I can bear what's to come."

Again came the sharp bark of a dog, and this time it was closer to his ear. Turning his face inland 'Zekiel saw through the dimness the wriggling body of a small, white animal, with the dark form of a man following close behind it.

"Any one there?" inquired a voice sharply.

"'Tis only me, Master Humphrey; me——'Zekiel Myners."

"Hullo, 'Zekiel; you coastguarding, too?"

"No, sir; only watching the water a bit before I go back home."

"Dreaming, 'Zekiel?"

"No, sir; I dunno as I was."

Master Humphrey came and sat down on the turf by

'Zekiel's side and tapped the ashes from his pipe, while the white dog sat sturdily on his haunches and looked out towards the sea, whining now and again as he felt the keenness of the night breeze.

"Much been happening in these parts since I was here last?" asked Master Humphrey, as he slowly filled his pipe again.

"No, sir; nothin' much to speak of. Just a few of the old people died off, and a few young ones come, an' a brave many stormy days an' nights, but they happen along every year; 'tisin' no news to tell of a storm."

"And Mary—is she all safe and sound?"

"Mary's all right, sir, bless her heart! Married since you left Landecarrook, an' she's got a fine boy of her own, sir, too. She's livin' up at the new cottage on the hill, she an' Peter, an——" 'Zekiel hesitated, "an' the stranger."

"What stranger is that?" Master Humphrey asked, a trifle indifferently.

"Her you saw with me to-day, sir. Her you said was a Spanish maid."

"Ah yes, I was forgetting." There was fresh interest in Master Humphrey's voice now. "However did she get to Landecarrook of all places in the world? Where does she spring from, and what is she doing here?"

"Ah, Master Humphrey, that's more'n we can tell.



Who the maid is, an' where she comes from, is things we don't know ; they'm as far from us now as they was the day she came to us, more'n two months ago."

"But who brought her? Why does she stay?"

"Nobody brought her, sir, not as they'd bring a livin', breathin' human bein'. She was thrown out down there on Averack beach like as if she was so much jetsam, an' 'twas there I found her."

"What does it mean, 'Zekiel? Has Landecarroch learned new ways? I don't understand. They didn't do these things, you must remember, before I went away."

"Nobody doesn' understand, sir. 'Tis as strange to us Landecarroch folks as 'tis to you. But I'll tell 'ee from the beginning, sir, if you've a mind to hear."

And there, on the same spot, his wild eyes conjured up the scene again, and in a low, passion-charged voice he put it into words, and made Master Humphrey see it, too. And the tale was so real and the boy's heart so full, and his words so wonderful that it seemed as if the black ship lay again under the cliff waiting for her boat to do its work, and that they could almost hear her straining hawsers, and the water lapping against her sides, with only the blackness of the night hiding her from their eyes.

"An' that's every word we know," declared 'Zekiel when his tale was told. "There, on Averack beach,

I come upon her, an' me an' Mary brought her back home."

"'Tis a strange tale, 'Zekiel," said Master Humphrey musingly. "What does the girl herself say about it?"

"That's the worst bit of all, sir. She doesn' say nothin', or we never get to know nothin', for we can't none of us make out a word she talks."

There was a pause when 'Zekiel had finished speaking, while Master Humphrey fell to thinking of the face of the girl who had stumbled into his arms a few hours before. She seemed, in very truth, to have the knack of banishing every-day modes of thought and action he decided, and he smiled unconsciously. 'Zekiel, too, was remembering the afternoon's meeting, and the throbs of the old pain stirred again at his heart.

It was then that with the suffering a new thought came swiftly to him, and his face grew hot in the darkness and his hands quivered. Twice he tried to speak, but the weight of his words shackled his tongue.

"Master Humphrey," he broke out at last, "I'm wonderin', would you be so kind as to do a great thing for me—a real big thing?"

There was awe in his voice, and Master Humphrey's first impulse was to laugh at him for his solemn way; but somehow, when 'Zekiel, stirred from his ordinary respect, laid a shaking hand upon his squire's sleeve, and

leaned towards him in a great earnestness, he felt that a laugh would be a cruelty, and he answered gravely. "I'll do anything I can to help you, and do it gladly, you may be sure of that, 'Zekiel."

"Learn me her talk, sir," he cried. "Learn me so that I can speak with her. I'd slave, an' slave, an' slave! Oh, Master Humphrey, if only I could get to her through those cursed, heathenish words! If only I could!"

"Ah," thought Master Humphrey, "that's how it is with him, poor 'Zekiel!" But aloud he said cheerfully, as if the learning of a language were a mere bagatelle, "Learn you! Of course I will. Spanish talk isn't altogether child's play, but come to me when you've an hour or so to spare and we'll try. You're too strong a fellow to be beaten by a lot of heathenish words."

"'Twould be a mighty thing for me, sir. You don't know how mighty a thing 'twould be," said 'Zekiel, his voice deepening to indistinctness as he tried to steady it.

"I think I do," Master Humphrey thought a while later, as he and his little white dog walked slowly back to big, lonely Pensallas in the valley.

## CHAPTER VIII.

**M**ASTER HUMPHREY sat before the fire in the small terrace room. He always came to an anchorage in the small terrace room when he lived at Pensallas alone. He had tried very often to live in the bigger rooms as he had done when the old squire was alive, but he always drifted away from them in about half-an-hour and found himself back again in the small terrace room. He thought, when he troubled to think of it at all, that it was because the smaller room was about the only one which was not lined with family portraits. Master Humphrey admired his family's portraits as some folks admire their family tree, because it is their family tree, and not as a specimen of arboriculture—the portraits might not be of Greek-god pattern, but they were of his ancestors. He also revered them, because he had begun life reverencing them. But the family portraits made Master Humphrey feel lonely now, they were so many, all paint and canvas together,

and he was one to himself; he felt that he almost owed them an apology for being alive and intrusive, and the desolate feeling lowered his spirits. Therefore, finding the truth of the saying, that "one is never so lonely as in a crowd," he avoided the crowd and left it to itself in silence and darkness.

On this evening, the second since he had galloped back from his wanderings, he lounged before his fire with his feet stretched to the warm stone coping round the hearth, fitting them to the hollows worn long ago by resting cavaliers or Elizabeth's adventurer-seamen, as they told of their past successes and failures, and hatched more for the future. His head rested on the flamboyant patterned damask of his favourite chair, and his eyes were turned upwards in lazy contemplation of the carving on the over-mantel, where the fruits and grains of the earth twined themselves sociably into a wreathing display of plenty with a fine disregard of seasonableness, while thin clouds of tobacco smoke rose as incense to the little painted gods sprawling across the ceiling. Dame Tellam was treading about the room, piling, with her own hands, fresh logs upon the hearth, and lighting the candles on the mantelpiece; for an extra gossip with the boy, grown man, was worth a risk of dignity.

"Am I forgiven, nurse, for scaring you out of your

wits—dropping from the skies into your linen-covered rooms?” asked Master Humphrey at the end of a long, spiral whiff of smoke.

Dame Tellam had been Master Humphrey's nurse in the days when he had been too young to revolt against such a functionary, and though promoted many years ago to housekeepership, she was always “nurse” to him in private and when her dignity could not suffer, as he was always “Master Humphrey” to her. But, indeed, he was “Master Humphrey” to most folks in Landecarrook, for they found it hard to believe that the “darin’ little mortal,” who had so often scuttled secretly from Pensallas down to the waterside, defying and cajoling them all by turns, was now a man grown and their own squire.

“Yes, Master Humphrey, I don't bear no malice in heart. Women-folks do like things to be all fitty when anybody comes, but, bless your soul! I've grown to expect 'ee when I see 'ee now, sir, an' the coverin's was all clean as new pins, so I wasn' ashamed. An' if your dinner wasn' such as I could have wished it, why, I knew 'twas nobody's fault but your own, sir, an' that's a brave bit of comfort to a woman's mind.”

Master Humphrey chuckled.

“I was always a graceless scamp, nurse, and I verily believe you were glad to see I hadn't changed my

ways. But, to tell truth, I was tired of roaming for a while, and I wanted to see how the old place was looking. You know the feeling I get? I used to have it just the same when I was a little man in frocks—must drop everything and run home to see how somebody, or something, was looking.”

“I mind it well, sir, and I hope as how you find the old place to your mind after your long spell in foreign parts?”

“The old place is all right,” said Master Humphrey, with a smile and a half-sigh, “but I see some changes about here and there.”

“’Twould be a wonder if you didn’, sir.”

“The boys and girls have grown up, nurse. Have I grown as fast as they have?”

“You ain’t one for agein’ fast yourself, sir; but boys an’ maids will grow, no matter whether you turn your head the other way or no; an’ then comes the courtin’, an’ the marryin’—plenty of that, sir, do what you will.”

“Pretty Mary Myners married, fancy that!” said Master Humphrey meditatively. “I knew Peter wanted her. Good Peter, he deserved her. But ’Zekiel, nurse—what has happened to ’Zekiel?”

“He’s mazed, sir—mazed, an’ nothin’ else! An’ all on account of that foreign maid as he got from the sea.”

"He was telling me of her yesterday. It's a strange tale!"

"Strange! Master Humphrey, 'tis worse than strange; an' I say as no good 'll ever come of it. There's somethin' about that maid that—well, I don't know what 'tis—but it gives me the shivers. I declare to goodness, if I meet that maid in the village, an' she turns them great burnin' eyes on me, I feel for all the world as if my bones was turned watery an' wouldn't so much as bear my weight; an' if I've got a thing in my hand—from a basket of eggs to my Bible—I'm like to drop it an' stand glarin' at her like a great conger. 'Tis as if she'd draw the heart out of a body, an' make it forget everythin', be it errands or God. I can't abide the maid; an' that poor lad 'Zekiel has gone ten years older since he picked her up."

"You see, she's different from the maidens he's known hereabouts all his life," protested Master Humphrey.

"Thanks be to the Lord! you'm right, sir. I wouldn't have our village maids goin' about in that there heathenish dress, an' with them great black eyes for whatever. No, sir; Landecarrocks maids are clear-skinned and modest-eyed, as a rule, an' content with a decent, sober petticoat an' bodice; but they didn't seem to suit 'Zekiel Myners, howsoever."



"Poor 'Zekiel!" murmured Master Humphrey.

"Poor 'Zekiel! you'm right, sir. 'Tis a bad day's work for a man when he takes to a creature as comes from the water; he's safe to get some harm from it. An' when 'tis some outlandish maiden as is brought to shore, I'm thinkin' 'tis worst of all."

"You mustn't be too hard on her, nurse. She is but flesh and blood," again the squire protested.

"I hope you'm right, sir," said the dame grimly, with a doubtful shake of her cap ribbons, "but I've known flesh an' blood do a deal of mischief before now." And with this profound opinion, and a final poke at the logs, Dame Tellam left the room, for there was flesh and blood in Pensallas kitchen, and, though home-grown, a watchful eye was never amiss.

Master Humphrey was in a mood of lazy contentment, for a long day in a small boat, cutting through the waves—grey waves with white caps to them—with the tiller in one's stiffening hand and the cold spray on one's face, is apt to make a man think he has done hard work when he gets back to dry warmth and thinks about it. And Master Humphrey stretched his inches—a considerable number, from the head on the damask, to the feet on the stone-coping—and he ruffled his short curls—curls that were fair, with that

ruddy shine on them which is less annoying in manhood than in youth—and he felt commonplacely happy.

There followed a long, drowsy silence; even the logs had given over snapping at the flames and the wind outside had dropped. Pensallas House boasted no ghost to wander about knocking at panels or clanking chains. The plots which had been hatched inside its walls had all been good, solid, human plots; perhaps a superabundance of loyalty or lawlessness may have run through them, but there was nothing ethereal or mystic about them; therefore, when Master Humphrey's thoughts, after wandering from fish to men, and from 'Zekiel Myners to Ursula Swain, were suddenly disturbed by a low, determined tapping at his window, they did not fly to spirits or wraiths; he merely felt surprise, and turned to face the unshuttered window, trying to pierce the outer darkness from his position by the hearth. But there was no shape or form to be seen through the glass, and, deciding that the sound was but the striking of a twig against the pane he turned again to the fire. No sooner had he done this than the tapping was repeated; then he rose and went to the window, and, opening it, asked quietly, "Who's there?"

The window was a deep one opening to the ground, and as Master Humphrey stood, holding the casement

wide with one hand, a slight scarlet figure came forward quickly out of the darkness and stepped into the room ; and he saw that it was the Spanish girl.

For a few moments there was silence, and Master Humphrey still held the open casement and wondered. But as the girl stood confronting him, with quick eyes and flushed face, her breast heaving from a hurried flight, and her scarlet shawl wound about her, there was in her such an incongruous blending of daring and childish apology, that amusement rose above the wonder, and, without a word, he drew her farther into the room, closed the casement, and shut out the night with the heavy tapestry curtain.

"And what is it all about?" he asked, slipping naturally into Spanish at the sight of her.

"Was it—wrong?" she whispered between her short breaths, as she stood hesitating—yet with a defiant laugh in her eyes—half-way towards the fire.

"Terribly wrong!" he declared with mock solemnity, and an answering smile in his eyes. "But come and be warm, you cold little mortal!" he added, as he took her hand in his own and felt that it was stiff and ice-cold from the frosty night.

"Ah!" she wailed peevishly, "I am ever cold here in these miles and miles of everlasting twilight. Winds, and land, and people are cold ; all cold—cold as death !"

"You say that!" he protested, somewhat gravely. "The friends you have met have warm hearts, at any rate."

She shrugged her shoulders and lifted her brows with a finished contempt better befitting an absolute monarch than a friendless waif from the sea.

"Well," he persisted, "is not Peter Ludgven as open-handed and good-hearted a fellow as ever trod God's earth? And Mary—is not she kind and gentle?" She shrugged her shoulders again impatiently at each question. "And then 'Zekiel?" he went on; "what of 'Zekiel?" and he smiled and waited for her answer.

"Ah, 'Zekiel! persistently 'Zekiel!" she cried, with a quick frown and a stamp of her foot. "It is because of 'Zekiel that I am here with you to-night."

"Because of 'Zekiel! What of him?"

"You are teaching him my language," she cried, and she stamped her foot again, finding that the action emphasised her feelings. "I do not wish him to know my language. I—I——" her eyes fell with a show of demureness beneath the question in his, and she added softly, "I like him better—as he is."

Master Humphrey stood still and looked at her, and for a moment he made no comment. Then he laid his pipe upon the table and took her hand again.

"Come," he said courteously, "come, and sit by

the fire," and he drew forward another chair beside his own and placed her in it. "Now, tell me, why do you wish that the poor fellow should not learn your Spanish talk?"

"I do not wish it, and, therefore, I do not wish it; that is enough for me," she exclaimed passionately. "It should also be enough for you—for him. Why should he learn if I do not wish it?"

"There might be a reason," returned Master Humphrey quietly, as he watched the blaze and tried to realise this logic.

"But you will not teach him, now that I have told you that I do not wish it—that I hate it?" She waited for his answer, but Master Humphrey was silent.

"You will not teach him now—now that I forbid it?" she demanded.

"Yes," he persisted quietly.

"But the thought of it is hateful to me," she broke out. "I shall suffer to hear him speak with his coarse voice. I shall be mad, wild, enraged, when I must listen to him. Now I am free from him if I wish; but when he knows my own words then he will pester me, he will pain me——"

"Do you never pain him?"

She looked at him, astonished. "Perhaps," she replied. "What of it?"

"Oh! nothing. No doubt our notions of fair play are wide apart."

"But you will do what I wish?"

"No; I have promised to teach him."

"I hate you!" she panted, sitting upright in the deep chair, and turning on him furiously.

Master Humphrey laughed. "Oh, no, you must not hate me, that would give *me* pain. I like pain as little as you do."

She paused, and again she looked at him astonished.

"You are a strange man," she declared, "but all Englishmen — you are English? — are not as you are."

"No," he answered, "most Englishmen, and women, too, take pain as it comes and don't grumble; but, you see, I am more as you are. I cannot allow it to come to me."

"Will you be unamiable then? Are you obstinate? Do you mean to teach this rough fisherman my own speech?"

"Yes," he answered slowly, keeping his eyes on the blazing logs that he might not look on her face. "He wishes to learn; I wish to help, when I can, and—I have promised."

He waited for the outbreak of her wrath, but she remained quite still.

And the logs, weary of resisting the blaze, gaped and fell apart, and the flames leaped up in triumph; the clock by the door ticked off its slow seconds into the great maw of that past which is never satisfied; and still the girl was silent.

After a while this silence which had, in its beginning, been a relief, began to be irksome. Master Humphrey chafed under it, and a great desire filled him to hear the girl's voice again; he wanted her to speak, even if she were angry. He found, too, that he wanted to look at her. Though he had turned his eyes to the fire that he might not see her furious at his words, he felt, now, that he wanted to see her face with the anger on it, and he turned his eyes from the fire again and looked at her.

But she, too, was looking into the flames, and her face was thoughtful, not angry.

Master Humphrey took courage from the sight, and with a light little laugh he ventured to break the silence. "I am sorry that it troubles you, but——" and he leaned towards her with mischief in his eyes, "you will be grateful to me when you hear how eloquent he grows."

She slowly withdrew her eyes from the fire and looked at him absently, then again she turned thoughtfully to the flames, while he watched her curiously and

wondered as to her next mood—and the length of her visit.

At last she raised her eyes to him again; and she was really wonderfully attractive in this softened mood, with the firelight trembling on her.

“Is 'Zekiel the only one you care for?”

“Oh, no,” he laughed. “I care, in some measure, for every one.”

“Will you trouble yourself for me, also?”

He bowed his head low in answer. “What shall it be? What shall I do? Shall I build a boat to carry you back to Spain?”

In an instant the softened mood was gone, the girl's eyes were wild and flashing, and she sprang to her feet in a passion of rage.

“Carry me back to Spain!” she cried. “How dare you! How dare you!”

“I do not dare,” he said, raising his hands in mock terror to shield himself from her fury.

She stood trembling before him, with her fingers clutching at her shawl.

“Come,” he said soothingly. “Don't be angry. I would not force you back to Spain. I thought you were yearning for warmer skies, and longed for home. Tell me what it is that I may do for you.”

The shock of his words had struck the blood from



her face, but his quiet manner now calmed her, and she answered: "Teach me your speech; that is what I would ask of you."

Master Humphrey looked at the gods on the ceiling, for he felt that the laughter, which would creep into his eyes, was safer in that direction.

"Never before," he declared, "have I set forth to instruct the young in any manner of thing, but I am not the man to shirk blessings when they fall."

"When shall I come to you?" she asked eagerly.

But the words made Master Humphrey somewhat thoughtful.

"Perhaps," he said slowly, "it would be better if you did not come."

She looked at him, wondering, and a little stern. "Must I not come here?"

"Perhaps it would be better if you did not come," he repeated. Then, noticing her look of wonderment he spoke lightly: "I must tell you that the old lady who guards my house is a very good lady—a very good lady, indeed—but, for some mysterious reason she does not welcome little girls."

"I am no little girl," she declared haughtily.

"I may say she does not welcome big girls either. In fact there are very few sizes she can bring herself to admit—and yours is a wrong one. Perhaps——"

"If you fear your house-woman I will not come," she remarked with perfect gravity. "I cannot make you brave."

And Master Humphrey rose from his chair and looked at her curiously.

This strange girl was charming; so unexpected in her ways and words; her rage and her smiles of such equal excellence; her pleadings and her petulance of such uncommon interest. He was finding infinite entertainment in the contemplation of her.

Finding her host grow silent under her contempt Teresa turned from him and paced the room, then she sighed and forgot her contempt and cried out in pity for herself.

"I must go back to the narrow cottage and shiver before the humble hearth, always prisoned, always cold. Ah!" and she clasped her hands dramatically, and looked about her in appreciation. "What would I not give for such a home as this?"

"You would find it dark and lonely," he remarked, roused by her admiration.

"No, no; I would fill it with light and sound," she declared.

"You might obtain more light, no doubt, without excessive trouble, but you would find it a hard task to fill it with much else down in these

outlandish parts. Cheerful folks do not care to come."

"They would come for me," she affirmed.

"Ah! I beg your pardon; they would come, of course, for you."

"You came."

"Yes, I came, but—I would not be impolite—but I did not come for you."

"Ah! but yes," she turned on him with half-closed, smiling eyes, then she paused. "It was one day," she went on slowly, "I walked here with 'Zekiel—rough 'Zekiel—and I saw this, your castle, all empty and closed, and I looked at 'Zekiel, and he seemed yet rougher to my eyes, and I said: 'Oh that the prince of this castle would return,' and then I said: 'The prince of this castle shall return.'" She looked at him as a mischievous child might look when fibbing for the sake of fun.

"Indeed!" he said, in mock astonishment.

"And you came," she concluded.

"Yes—I came," he admitted; and for a moment the remembrance of the sudden longing for home, which had gripped him in that dirty little Spanish street, came back to him.

Teresa had left his side and was gliding about the room, peering at the books, and the statues, and the

pictures, softly smoothing the rich curtains, testing the comfort of the chairs. At length she came to a stand-still before a long, bevelled mirror, and the gleam of it held her as if in a spell; unconsciously she turned from side to side, tipping her chin, and drooping her lids, lost to the recollection of all other matters in sheer marvelling at her own reflection.

Master Humphrey stood and watched her, and many minutes passed before he chose to interrupt her satisfaction. At length he spoke. "And when shall we have our first lesson?" he asked quietly.

But the break of his words was no interruption to her; she did not turn from the contemplation of her raised eyebrows, which happened to be engrossing her attention at the moment; she scarcely heard his voice.

"They would come for me," she murmured absently, then fell to silence again.

Master Humphrey still watched her, in smiling curiosity, and began to contemplate the situation. A beautiful maid had stepped suddenly out of the dark night into his home, and seemed to have become lost to consciousness of the necessity of departure in her appreciation of her surroundings. Time was passing, in the methodical way it had, and still the maid stood there, gravely, before the mirror, turning her head

from side to side, and apparently well satisfied to continue doing so for some time to come. He mildly wondered, with the smile lurking in his eyes, if the rule of etiquette had yet been decided upon which applied to his position at the moment. At length he raised his voice and spoke again.

"When you have appreciated it to your entire satisfaction perhaps you will command me."

Then she started and faced him, and there was pleased wonder in her eyes.

"I am very beautiful," she said solemnly.

"You are right," he agreed. "Be grateful to Spain."

Again her face changed, as a summer scene is changed by a summer storm.

"Do not say that!" she cried. "Do not speak of Spain to me! It is hateful to me! I will be of your people, of your land, though it is gloomy, and grey, and cold."

"Then, perhaps, you will decide upon an hour in which I may teach you its language," he remarked. To him she seemed as a specimen of uncurbed animal, not entirely dangerous, but wild enough to prove exciting.

"I will come to you, by the sea, to-morrow morning—evening—when you will. I do not care."

"Ah!—perhaps then—the morning would be—better. Does Peter know that you have come here to-night?"

"No, no; how could he know? I could not tell him. And now, must I go? Must I go from all this warmth, and beauty, back to that mean little home?"

"I am afraid you must," he answered.

She went to the window, and, holding back the curtain, looked out.

"Ah!" she cried in terror, "it is dark—dark as a grave. I am fearful! I shall die of fear. I cannot go! I cannot put my foot out into it, and walk through those black paths."

She turned to him, trembling, and laid her clinging hands upon his sleeve.

"Come, come," he said soothingly, holding her to him closely, as one would hold a frightened child, "there is no reason for fear or dying. We are all friendly folk in these parts. But I will take care of you, little coward! You shall not face it alone."

So they left the light and the warmth, and they stepped out into the cold darkness, through the window by which the girl had come. And, though she still clung closely to Master Humphrey's arm in

her fear, no more words passed between them until they reached the village street.

It was here that Peter Ludgven met them, and Master Humphrey, recognising him, called out: "Is that you, Ludgven?"

Peter turned. "Yes, Master Humphrey."

"I've a charge to hand over to your keeping," said the squire cheerfully. "This child is fearful of the dark, so I gave myself the post of watch-dog."

"You'm very good, sir," said Peter slowly. "I'm main sorry you should a-been troubled, sir."

"Oh! no trouble; don't think that. Cold night, Peter?"

"Mortal cold, sir."

"I'll say 'good-night' now, then." He laid his hand firmly on Teresa's which still gripped his sleeve, and then he loosed it gently and gave her into Peter's care.

"Good-night, sir, an' thank you kindly," replied Peter. But as he climbed the hill, with the girl by his side, an uncomfortable thought crept into his mind. "Where's the maid been?" he wondered. "How did she come 'pon Master Humphrey? Master Humphrey seemed free enough about the matter—but he didn' say——" Thought after thought drifted through Peter's mind, but the thought which came last and stayed was the thought

which had come the first time he had set eyes on her, that morning after the storm. "She's got a mortal pretty face—a mortal pretty face!"

So they, too, walked on in silence until they reached the little white cottage, and Mary came hurrying to the door.

"Oh, Peter, Teresa's never come back! She started off——" she began in scared tones. But Peter interrupted her cheerily.

"Don't you be frettin'. She's here 'long with me. I've brought her back right enough."

But the sight of the two figures on the threshold, all safe and well, seemed to bring no great comfort to Mary Ludgven after all, for she stepped back quickly and turned all white and trembling, as if something had bruised her heart.



## CHAPTER IX.

**I**T was a glorious day, that day when jealousy—the red, raging devil—entered into 'Zekiel Myners' heart and killed his peace. But the merry sun cared nothing for the pang at the boy's heart as he laughed down at the heaving sea, for his sympathies are flagrantly with the cheerful. And the heaving sea had never a glance for the wild-hearted lover, as it coquetted with the joyous god, its answering love-light sparkling on every ripple, and its blue beauty defying all winter's chilly hints and warnings. Envy had lain in 'Zekiel's' heart for many days, a stinging pain which pulsed with fresh life whenever his eyes fell upon Master Humphrey and acknowledged his superiority; but this new torment was of a mightier growth than envy, it was jealousy, bitter and unreasoning, and it entered in and stayed.

For it was on this sunny, winter day that Master Humphrey and the Spanish girl met on Landecarrook

beach, and 'Zekiel, mending his nets in the shelter of a rock, glanced up, all unprepared, and saw the meeting. At the sight he drew himself suddenly upright, then swayed feebly, for a great blow seemed to have fallen athwart his heart. And then the new devil rushed in—in to his very soul—and he watched the man and the maid with blazing eyes. He saw their hands touch and the moment seemed an eternity. He saw them turn together and loiter by the glistening baby-waves, and every footfall trampled on his pain and made him wince. He heard a light laugh float to him from Teresa's throat—a laugh for which he would have bartered his salvation if he could have called it from her. He knew that they were speaking freely and easily in that language which was to him as impossible as the speech of angels. And he turned sick with the despair of it all, his nets dropped from his hands, and his heart withered and narrowed.

For a while the two figures dallied by the waves, pacing slowly to and fro across the beach, leaving their light footprints upon the firm sand, as they left their deeper ones on a boy's soul; but at length they turned towards a group of rocks, and reaching a low, smooth slab, sat down upon it side by side and turned their faces to each other. This much 'Zekiel could see, and though he could not hear their words or understand

them even if he heard, the thought of what the words might be, swelled in his brain and set it seething.

The callous sun still smiled and coquetted with the little waves; the sea-birds screeched and swooped across the sky as if conscious of the value of a clear, blue background for white wings touched with grey; the keen air stirred the pulses and brought a wonderful colour to Teresa's cheeks, and the mist which still hung here and there was but the morning's pride. But all this beauty might have been chaos for any ease it brought to 'Zekiel; he stood with his nets all tangled as they fell from his hands, and his eyes blazing on the man and the maid as they lingered side by side.

Higher on the cliff a little face was watching 'Zekiel, a merry little face with pity on it, and dark curls for a pleasant frame. It had seen all that 'Zekiel had seen, and it had not liked the sight; but degrees of dislike are wide apart, as are also the methods of enduring.

A sudden soft ripple of laughter above him startled 'Zekiel; he had thought he was alone, and he turned angrily to the intruder. Agrimony! A common little Landecarrook maid! She was to witness his tragedy! There was no fitness in the fact. Looking up at her he saw only the mirth on her face, not the pity;

and he chafed, and he hated her suddenly, and scowled.

But still the laughter rippled out, low and clear, and seemingly heartless; and then for a time the merry face was hidden in two freckled little hands, while a pair of shoulders swayed to the time of the hilarity.

"'Bide quiet, can't 'ee!" 'Zekiel snapped out fiercely.

Then the face was lifted again, and the red lips narrowed from laughter to words.

"Our squires seem like to be stolen from our ladies." The words came down to him in mocking confidence, and one freckled little hand waved towards the figures on the beach.

"'Tis the squires that do the stealin'," raged 'Zekiel.

At that Agrimony fell to laughing again and 'Zekiel's throat grew tight and strained with the wrath he was choking back. Then he looked again at the beach, and it so happened that above Agrimony's maddening titter he heard Teresa laugh—a young, pleased laugh—and he saw her put out her hand and lay it on Master Humphrey's. The sight struck a piteous cry from him, and, with gripped hands, he left his work and strode towards them.

"How durst you?" he demanded, as he stood before them, red with rage and shaking with all

the passions that surged in him. "How durst you do it?"

For a whole minute there was absolute silence, except for the monotonous plash of the waves and the screech of the gulls; but in that minute Teresa's smiles reshaped themselves and stiffened into frowns. She did not know the meaning of 'Zekiel's words, but she saw the rage in his eyes, and his very presence was an intrusion, and distasteful to her at the moment. Master Humphrey, however, was only astonished as he looked at the boy's desperate face.

"What is it, 'Zekiel?" he asked kindly. "What is wrong?"

"Wrong!" came the cry, with that hopeless pain-note in it—the note which can suddenly moisten eyelids arid for years. "'Tis all wrong! 'Tis a shameful wrong, an' I won't stand by and bear it!"

"But, for Heaven's sake, man, explain! Who is wrong? What is wrong? Am I wrong, do you say?"

"You'm a——" But 'Zekiel's furious words stopped short, and his denunciation died in his teeth, for he looked into Master Humphrey's eyes, and, with a magnificent justice, acknowledged his honesty. "Oh, Master Humphrey, sir," he cried out again in his pain, "how durst you do it? How durst you do it?"

"What have I done? Tell me, 'Zekiel, what have I done?" demanded the squire.

"Done! you'm teachin' her to love 'ee, Master Humphrey. You'm winnin' of her heart just to pass away a chance hour or so, to throw it off again like an old glove when you've a-done with it, an' drive me mad."

"'Zekiel," said Master Humphrey, with a quick, haughty lift of his head, "you must be mad already to say this to me."

"An' I prayed 'ee to help me," went on 'Zekiel, blind to the squire's anger. "I begged of 'ee to draw me closer to her, an' you've come between us. Oh, Master Humphrey! what's your play-love beside of mine?"

In the face of the boy's real pain, Master Humphrey's wrath died quickly. "It is a great mistake," he said quietly. "I have not won this girl's love. I have not sought to win it; though I account myself answerable to no one for my loves or for my hates, and I certainly should not tolerate question or interference. You asked a favour of me, so did this girl; I granted both. You wish to know her language, she wishes to know yours. Is it fair that you fret because I do for her what I willingly do for you?"

Master Humphrey stopped speaking, and stood,

white and dignified, before his accuser. Teresa on the ledge above him, crouched with anger-red cheeks and gripped hands. 'Zekiel stood still as a statue and tried to realise it all. At last, as he looked long and justly at his squire—debonair, well-favoured Master Humphrey Harle—the realisation came in full measure, and broke the spirit in him.

"My God! my God!" he cried out, "what's my chance against such as him?"

The hopelessness of it all goaded him, and he stumbled forward a step or two, throwing out his arms towards Master Humphrey in his despair. Poor 'Zekiel! The action held no malice; but the girl standing on the rock-slab, with her eyes blazing down upon him, saw the gesture and misread it, and leaping quickly on to the sand, struck him across the face with her little clenched fist.

In an instant Master Humphrey had sprung forward and gripped her by the arms, but he was too late to stay her hand, and for a moment 'Zekiel staggered under the unexpected blow. Then the blood which had rushed to his face ebbed slowly away, leaving him pallid, with the mark of the girl's knuckles standing out in ugly relief.

For a long moment they stood motionless; then, without another word, 'Zekiel turned on his heel and

strode away from them, across the sands and upwards to the downs.

Between the two who stayed there was silence, until silence became unbearable. Master Humphrey still gripped the girl's hot, brown arm, and she glared back at him with wide defiant eyes. Then she laughed, a callous little laugh which filled his soul with a minute's loathing.

"You little fury!" he muttered; "you little fiend!"

"He is a devil!" she cried.

"He is an honest fellow," he declared, "and I am going to him." And Master Humphrey loosed his hold of her arm, and he, too, walked away from her across the beach and up the cliff path to the downs.

The girl, left alone, clenched her teeth until they pained her, and stood watching the two men go from her, her own face ugly with mortification and rage.

And then, from her perch on the cliff came Agri-mony and laughed at her, and with a jerk of her head towards the figures moving away the laughter took on an unbearable note, and "You've a-lost 'em both this mornin', I'm thinkin'," she tittered. Teresa understood little of her words, but the language of laughter is cosmopolitan, and she understood that the little village maid was taunting her. This third insult whipped her wrath to fury and she lifted her clenched



hand again to beat down the face which offended her. But Agrimony was quick and quite unawed; stepping back and shaking her head till her curls were all a-bobbing, she waved her aggravating little hand and skipped away, leaving Teresa to chafe under her laughter as she went.

And Teresa did chafe. She looked from the dancing figure on the beach to the two men away in the distance, and her face was dark and passionate. In half a morning hour Landecarro had grown hateful as Spain; every human being she knew, or had ever known, was hateful. Agrimony, on the beach, turned before dancing up the slope to the village street and curtsied low with mock reverence. The two men on the downs had met together. Teresa saw it all and raged at it, then she tossed her head defiantly and walked back to the village alone.

"There's no manner of good in that maid," declared Ann Vitty, as she paused in her knitting and watched the girl go up by the corner of her garden from the street. "To my mind she's a-got a powerful strong look of the black gentleman about her."

"Maybe you'm right," agreed Luke Tregay, taking his little black pipe from his mouth to do it. "Maybe you'm right. I dunno as I know the looks of that gen'leman over-well myself, so I wouldn' go for to set

my knowledge of 'un against your own ; but I must say the maid ain't nothin' like our Landecarrocks maids, nor like any other body as ever I've a-seen, so I make no doubt she's like them as I *'aven't* seen. 'Tis a mortal heathenish way she's got with her."

"Ah!" said Ann Vitty meditatively, "'twas queer work—her comin' that way. Queer things do happen one time an' another, of course ; but I must say as I wouldn't like to fall under her eye."

"'Tis a fine bold eye, too," declared Luke with a good courage, preparing to better his lapse into ponderous pleasantry. "In the matter of maids' eyes you must know, Ann, 'tis we men-folk as must be the judges. Law, bless me! wimmen-folk can't never see straight when 'tis other wimmen-folk's eyes as is the view to be looked 'pon."

"Men-folks! Poor, silly creatures, sure enough, to set about judgin'," retorted Ann with scorn. "Talk about wimmen-folk not seein' straight! Men-folk don't see nothin' at all, straight or crooked. A bold-eyed maid looks at 'em, an' they'm blinded ; an', 'Law me!' they call out, 'What bootiful eyes she hev a-got ; I can't see nothin' for dazzle.' Dazzle's booty to you men-folk. You'm always for worshipping what you can't make out."

Luke chuckled as the young ways of men were

fathered on him. He liked the delicate inclusion of himself in the green stupidity; and Ann Vitty seemed to recognise this and regret it, for her next words were chosen with a view to counteracting the compliment.

"An' you, too, I b'leeve, come to your age, would be just as foolish as the young ones if that maid were to turn an' look at 'ce."

"Maybe you'm right, my dear soul. Humans is somethin' like ducks; can't see but with one eye at a time, an' that one's all for some little bit of shiney trade that happens along. But, law! Ann Vitty, the ways of maids is pretty," he concluded indulgently.

"'Twas the ways of men-folk we was considerin'," Ann Vitty corrected with some grimness. "*They* wasn' much to boast of for prettiness in my day, an' now I call 'em mazed."

"Your day was my day, Ann." Luke's voice took a conciliatory note. "An' I make no doubt we was all mazed in our fathers' and mothers' eyes. But we didn' cry out for no Spanish maids, anyhow; Landecarrocks eyes was bright enough for us."

Ann Vitty had been a Landecarrocks maid herself and the implied compliment was not wasted; she had reached the turning of the heel in her knitting, and the business was absorbing, but the tone in which

she counted her stitches was free from the asperity which had run through her last remark, and when she spoke again she had waived aside the weaknesses of man, and had turned to the uncertainty of the fattening of pigs.

Daniel Laskey, who leaned against his own particular hollow in the wall, still looked with absent eyes at the corner by which the foreign maid had passed. But if his thoughts had trailed away to the pretty ways—or otherwise—of other maids he had known in that far-off boyhood of his, at any rate he said nothing of the matter, only murmured, "H'm!" when the silence seemed to call for sound.

Mary Ludgven was setting the table for dinner when Teresa reached the cottage door. Her face was pale, but her lips were smiling as she moved to and fro, cooing the while to Zel, who lay stretched on his back in the cradle, fighting the air with his bare legs and arms. Teresa stood and watched them for a moment unnoticed, but the sight did not seem to please her, for the gleam in her eyes was unholy, and her red lips were scornful.

At length, Mary, turning towards the door, saw the girl, and started.

"Oh, I didn' know you was there!" she exclaimed, striving, as she always did, to force a welcome note

into her voice. "You'm just in time for dinner. I was on my way to call Peter."

"I go," cried Teresa, who had gathered the sense of the words, and she turned quickly to the little wooden gate at the side, which led to Peter's vegetable garden on the slope of the hill.

Mary's first impulse was to forbid the girl to go. "No, no——" she began, but Teresa was too quick for forbiddings. And "Why shouldn' she go?" Mary demanded of herself, with that never-ending struggle to be just to the girl. Lifting Zel from his cradle she sauntered out to the gate, and leaned against it as Teresa went up the garden path with slackening pace.

"Pe—ter," came Teresa's voice, low and trembling.

"Why does she say it like that?" thought Mary resentfully. Perhaps she over-blamed a softness of voice which was but instinctive with the girl—except in her wrath; but it was as well for Mary's peace that she could not read the girl's heart at the moment, stinging as it was from what she felt to be the defeat and humiliation of the morning, and craving to assert her power again, over some one—over any one.

But the voice was too low. Peter did not hear it.

He was shouting a cheerful song with the full strength of his lungs, and his back was turned to her.

"Peter!" she called again, "Peter! Peter!"

This time her voice, though still low, was imperative.

"Right! I'm a-comin'," shouted Peter. "I've just a-got to turn this foot or two of weed." And he went on with his labour and his song, while Mary leaned heavily against the gate and still followed Teresa with wide, pained eyes. There was no reason why Mary's heart should pant so hardly and her breath struggle in her throat; she was foolish, she told herself again and again. There was no reason for fear, but still the pain was there.

"Ah, Peter!" Teresa's voice was tense now and vibrating.

"All right," he answered again, without looking up, "'twon't take but a minute or so——"

But Teresa had drawn close to him, and she laid her hand upon his stooping shoulder. Then, with a start, Peter straightened his back and looked at her, and their eyes met. The song—that silly, cheerful song—it was forgotten, of course; the smile on his face died, too. The fat, pink-brown worms slid from the newly-turned clod and the sudden touch of winter air, down into the warmth and security of the good

brown earth. But Peter did not heed them; his eyes, and his senses, and his will were held as if they were enmeshed in the girl's lashes or clipped by her lids. Teresa was asserting her power; she was recovering her slackened strength; and Peter—humble Peter Ludgven—was accounted worthy enough subject for the testing of that power; and he gazed upon her, a fixed, spell-bound gaze, as if his soul's salvation lay deep down in her baffling, inscrutable eyes. Then she moved slowly from him, and he dropped his spade and followed her.

Mary, who had watched it all, bowed her head on her baby's warm, chubby shoulder, and closed her eyes, as if she hoped this act might bar the recollection from her mind as the lids barred the scene from her sight. Then she turned away from the garden and went into the house, and waited.

"Why does the light, an' the strength, an' the happiness go out of every man an' woman's face as looks upon her?" she asked wildly. "Why did she ever come to my doors?"

But there was no answer to her cry, only Peter's heavy footsteps drew nearer and then came in at the door. There was a dazed look on his face which hurt his wife's heart; it was as if he had become a stranger to her. With a sudden impulse she put

the child into his arms and turned to Teresa in dumb petition. Teresa was smiling placidly upon the father and child, but to Mary it seemed that the eyes between the girl's narrowed lids looked pitiless.



## CHAPTER X.

“**Y**OU will come, Teresa?”

There was pleading, mock or real, in Master Humphrey’s voice—the pleading of a man accustomed to win his wish.

It was a bleak afternoon a few days before Christmas, and all along the lonely lane in which they stood, the wind swept, keen and blustering, over the dry white ground, whirling the sticks, and twigs, and fallen leaves, then driving them on before its boisterousness, and whistling through the bare, bending branches overhead.

All that day Teresa had been sullen and silent, with ugly lines on her forehead, as she cowered by the hearth; until Mary, taxing to the fullest her own powers of interpretation and pantomimic action, had roused her, and induced her to leave her brooding and face the world out of doors, bringing down her

own best shawl—a gorgeous tartan brought round to Landecarroch by the good ship *Mary Jean* of Glasgow—as a lure. And Teresa, either won by the colours of it, or over-tired of her own megrims, had risen impatiently, and, snatching the gay thing from Mary's hands, had wound it about herself in the "heathenish manner" which the villagers found so trying to their sense of fitness, and had gone out ungraciously, turning her face towards Pensallas.

"You will come, Teresa?"

The words were spoken suddenly behind her as she stood by a gateway and looked through it to the sea. Turning quickly she saw Master Humphrey, ruddy and smiling, with his hands stretched out to her, part mocking, part deprecating.

For a month Teresa had hated Master Humphrey and her recollection of him in the aggregate—his laughing, unconcerned face, his tolerant kindness, his jests when she would be serious, his smiles when she would be tragic, his championship of 'Zekiel, his desertion of herself. To a certain extent 'Zekiel had been graciously forgiven for obtruding his pain and passion upon her so inconveniently, and 'Zekiel, with his heart full of misery, had had no more spirit than to snatch hungrily at the crumbs of comfort she tossed to him. But with Master Humphrey it was

another matter. 'Zekiel was but a common fisher-boy, and his very soul was given over to her, whether she desired it or not. Master Humphrey was the squire, with wealth and beautiful possessions, and he had been indifferent to her. Now for a month she had met him and passed him with never a glance or a word, but the look in her eyes and the set of her lips did not mean that she had forgotten.

Master Humphrey had gone on his way cheerily as ever, amused by the girl's temper when he noticed it, but fairly unconcerned. But as the days passed, her haughty little face began to interest him, perhaps to pique him, and he felt that he would like to be friends with her again. Christmas was coming and he wanted her to smile and say that she would come to his dance in the barn—not furrow her brow and quarrel. Besides, there was that spell which she seemed to have cast over 'Zekiel; he wanted to watch her ways. It was a dangerous game, interfering with 'Zekiel's love-experience, but it would be interesting to find where the glamour lay——

She turned at his words and saw him standing there. And if for a moment an evil wave passed over her face, ugly and startling, it was so fleeting that a second later Master Humphrey doubted the truth of his own sight, as she stepped closer to him, and looked at him

with the soft radiance welling in her eyes which had proved poor 'Zekiel's undoing.

A wonderful flush stole over her face, he saw ; it was like the rosy bloom on a little child's cheeks. And that speck of light, there, deep in her eyes ! It seemed to tremble, then to grow small, then to dilate ! It was curious ! it was most fascinating ! It seemed to hold the eyes that looked at it ; or was it the brain it struck ?

A dazed, straining look crept into Master Humphrey's laughing eyes ; deep, stern lines came and lay about his lips where his smiles had lain before. They made him seem suddenly quite old, as if he had been but masquerading as the young debonair squire—playing at boyishness for a whim, until now. He stood staring at the girl, oblivious of the fact that a gaze of several minutes' length might be deemed uncivil.

It was Teresa who broke the long silence. She laughed, a little, low, wooing laugh, which pardoned the incivility before it was repented of, and said softly : " I will come if you wish for me."

In the same half-conscious manner he took her hands and drew her towards him.

" And you will dance with me ?" His voice was now a whisper.

" And I will dance with you," she answered, with her eyes still looking unshrinkingly into his.

That wonderful fleck of light ! It was tantalising him ; it was evading him ; it had vanished. Surely it was fancied ; it was really never there ! But, as he felt the shock of loss, of disappointment, it had danced back again. He had sometimes watched sunshine trembling in the brown hollows of a trout stream ; it had been beauty on a larger scale than this, but it had never stolen his senses. Now, in the bewitchment, he drew the girl still closer, and the muscles of his hands stiffened to a strength he did not guess. Teresa's face was close to his ; her lips were parted——

A sudden blast of wind came tearing and moaning through the lane. It pierced the girl's sensitive body, it chilled the blood in her veins and set a quick anger in her eyes.

"A—h !" said Master Humphrey. He drew his eyes from hers, and dropped her hands ; and there was some mingling of a groan and a sigh of relief in his voice ; then he looked slowly at the hedges and the road, as if they were new to him. The wind's fury had died as suddenly as it had risen, and Teresa's anger was gone with it. She moved from the gateway now and went slowly down the lane, and Master Humphrey moved too, and walked by her side. But it was a glint of triumph which lay at the

back of the girl's eyes when they were turned from the squire's face.

Master Humphrey had become dull. Having won his wish, he seemed to have little to say that afternoon. The whole length of the lane he paced at Teresa's side, but his eyes were turned persistently from her and were fixed upon the bare, wind-swept ground before him, as a child, who, having dropped a treasure on his outward way, is now returning carefully.

And the biting air which brought the blood to his face, drained it from Teresa's. She grew white and cold and shivered beneath Mary's tartan. "I shall return to the hearth," she said pettishly, as she faced back again. "There is no pleasure in this cold pacing."

Master Humphrey turned, too, and then he dared to look at her again. But a sudden gust buffeted the last remnants of her patience. "Ah! what a dull, icy land, and people!" she cried. "It is insupportable! not to be borne!" And with a gesture of disgust she turned from him quickly and sped away, leaving him standing in the lane alone.

With slow steps Master Humphrey retraced his way, and stood again by the gateway where he had found Teresa, and looked across the leaden waters.

"It was as if one were dreaming," he said half-

aloud. Then he passed his hand across his eyes. "I am awake now," he added; "I was a fool!" Then he leaned on the top bar and whistled most cheerfully; and a little water-course, trickling lazily down the hedge on the other side of the road, played *secondo* to his tune.

The early winter dimness was beginning to tone down the day colours, when quick footsteps, hurrying over the hard ground, dominated the duet. Master Humphrey turned from his gateway and saw a little figure in a hooded blue cloak, whose breath came fast, and whose cheeks were pink from her hurry through the keen and boisterous air.

"Ursula! You, and all alone!"

"Ah! Humphrey," she panted, "I am glad. I am come from Venton Cottages, where I walked quite early this afternoon to learn how Ann Teagle fares, for grandfather was busy with his writings; and the cottagers found so much to say, and I so much to see, that the light was fading before I remembered my homeward walk, and I began to fear that darkness would come upon me and grandfather would be grieved."

There was no excess of shyness or self-consciousness on Ursula's little face in these days; that had passed with the first strangeness of Master Humphrey's

home-coming. She, at any rate, took no heed of the ageing properties of three years. He was once more the fellow-creature she knew most freely of all in her small world; he was her play-fellow again, with only the games a trifle graver.

"There will be no darkness yet awhile," he assured her cheerfully for her comfort. Then, as he looked at her confident little face, a sudden impulse made him say: "I have been talking with the Spanish maid, Ursula."

He did not know why he told her, nor why he looked at her so anxiously when he had done it; but when he saw her gentle eyes grow thoughtful he suddenly looked away, and fingered a lichened tree bole, and waited for her to speak.

"Poor maid!" she said. "Grandfather always says, 'Poor maid! poor stranger in a strange land!' when he speaks of her."

"And you?" he asked. "Do you pity her?"

"I?" she answered. "I think I fear her—when I am by her, but when I am apart from her I think of her very often."

"What do you think of her then?"

"She is so wonderful! Oh, Humphrey! she must have seen—she must have lived in some of those wonderful lands——"



"Have not I?" he protested.

"And she is so beautiful——"

"Am not I?" he demanded laughing.

"Truly; I will grant that you are a wonderful, beautiful pair."

"No, do not pair us," he said, growing grave.

Then Ursula remembered the dimness again.

"I must not loiter," she sighed regretfully. "Will you not come with me, Humphrey? Agrimony shall bring a third cup for you if you will."

But Master Humphrey looked troubled.

"No, dear," he said hesitating, "I think I will not come. I—I feel scarcely fit to come." He laughed unnaturally. "I have been—I am smirched!" He held out his hands to her with the lichen dust on them.

Ursula laughed at him.

"It is but a little lichen dust, stupid Humphrey! Blow it away."

He blew and the light dust disappeared, but still a dark streak remained. Then he looked at her again, with more trouble on his face than the occasion seemed to need, and again Ursula laughed at him.

"Oh, stupid, helpless Humphrey! to fret for such a little spot! I will soon make it right."

She ran to the stream which trickled down the

opposite hedge, and, dabbling her little handkerchief in it, came back and took his hand in hers. Quite soberly she rubbed away at his palm with the damp cambric until the streak was gone, and then, "The other, please," she said, "for I will make you quite clean again." And she rubbed the second palm with much thoroughness. "Now, dry them," she commanded with a business-like air.

"Look at me, Ursula," said Master Humphrey, with sharp imperativeness, his wet hands still outstretched, and she looked up at him quickly with the demure little smile he knew so well. But to-day there was a pretty gleam in her eyes, and that he did not remember to have seen before—perhaps he had never noticed Ursula's eyes before. Now the pretty gleam startled him; he liked it, and then he regretted it. For one moment it recalled Teresa's eyes, but the next moment that recollection and the regret were both gone. This was such an honest little gleam; it shone so steadily. The old smile came back to his lips again and both faces looked young and very happy.

"Dry your hands, silly Humphrey!" she said again. And he drew his handkerchief from his pocket and obeyed her. Then he took the little wet one from her and wrapped it in his own, and he laughed at

her, and she at him; and the bleak, wintry world seemed to have become a wonderfully pleasant place to both of them, though neither stopped to wonder why. So they turned their faces villagewards and walked briskly on.

There was clamour to be heard when they neared the boat-sheds, and while they wondered at it, the clamour was hushed and a low murmur took its place, rising now and again above the wail and roar of the wind. Coming closer they looked down upon a group of men and boys, wives and maids, and many brown-legged children; while, apart from these, chasing along the shore, were two other figures, and the first was Sam'le Laskey, and the second was 'Zekiel Myners; and Sam'le was the pursued, and 'Zekiel the pursuer. The children were laughing and shrieking excitedly, but the early grins of the elders had already passed out of their eyes, even while they lingered on the lips, and their calls were protests and admonitions.

"'Zekiel playing with Samuel Laskey!" exclaimed Ursula surprised.

But as she said it Sam'le doubled and both faces were turned for some moments inland, and then they saw that though on Sam'le's face there lay a sort of half-pleased, half-proud daring, on 'Zekiel's there was only rage.

"What does it mean?" asked Master Humphrey, moving towards the little crowd.

"Why, sir," answered a fisher-boy, "'twasn' nothin' but fun to begin with. We was just throwin' a word or two to 'Zekiel 'bout his maid, an' he didn' make no caprouse 'bout it at all, but that there great bufflehead, Sam'le, must needs go an' sing out some-thin'—well, sir, 'twasn' no purty speech—an' 'Zekiel he was up in a minute, an' he made for Sam'le. Sam'le was a brave way off an' seed 'Zekiel a-coming, an' runned, but I'm thinkin' 'tis a brave time since Sam'le done such hard work as he's a-doing now. He'll get more'n he thought for when 'Zekiel do get 'en, by the look of it."

From where they stood they could see that Sam'le was panting, and that the smile had died from his face and something like fear had taken its place; and it seemed as if 'Zekiel's rage must have blinded his own eyes, for Sam'le's clumsy turns and manœuvrings saved him each time.

After a minute or two Master Humphrey moved forward to interfere and stop the chase which had grown too serious to be watched as play, but Sam'le turned suddenly, and, stumbling up to a pile of old planks, clambered up them and ran along the top. In an instant 'Zekiel sprang up after him, and then the

chase was over, for the pile narrowed to a single plank which stretched out over the sea at high water, and the tide was now at the full.

The crowd realised the situation before it dawned on Sam'le himself. When he reached the single plank and saw that he could go no farther, and heard the footsteps clattering close behind him, he looked down at the deep, green water desperately, and then he turned to 'Zekiel with terrified eyes, and the tears ran big and quick down his cheeks, and he cried loudly in his fear.

"Don't 'ee hurt 'en!" cried one woman.

"He won't do nothin' to ole Sam'le," said another.

But 'Zekiel in this mood was not to be reckoned with. Sam'le's taunt had goaded him, and the chase after Sam'le had heated his blood to a dangerous point. Now that Sam'le was in his power he fell on him and gripped him as the silly fellow faced about trembling between two terrors; then, shaking him till his loose lips fell farther apart and his silly, tear-wet face whitened, he gripped him tighter, and forcing him to the very end of the plank held him forward over the water lying dark and noiseless below.

"Ah!" shrieked one of the women, "Lord save 'en! 'Zekiel's a-goin' to throw 'en in the sea!"

"Leave 'en bide, 'Zekiel!" shouted one of the men,

but the words were caught by the wind, and 'Zekiel seemed not to hear.

"The madness of it!" cried Master Humphrey, hurrying forward to stop the work. But the little figure which had stood so silently beside him watching it all, was quicker than he, and, in another moment Ursula, with her blue hood blown back from her face and her cloak flying in the wind, climbed lightly up the old wood pile, and ran along the single, swaying plank until she had reached the two men. Then, with all her strength, she clutched 'Zekiel's arm and forced him back a few inches from the dangerous angle at which he leaned.

He turned on her furiously, neither knowing nor caring who was at his arm; and the crowd on the shore held its breath as it saw the rage on his face, and the bending plank, and the little lady's peril.

With a rough jerk he tried to free himself; and then the crowd cried out in its horror, for the jerk shook Ursula's slight foothold, and she swayed back in a way that made their hearts rise in their throats. Before she had lost her balance, however, Master Humphrey was near enough to save her; but 'Zekiel was swifter than he; seeing her danger, the arms which were forcing one fellow-creature into peril were turned, instinctively, to clutch another from it. He grasped

her cloak and held her in an iron-strong grip until she stood safe and steady beside him. Then he himself stood, sobered and rather dizzy, and looked at her with shame in his eyes. Master Humphrey's arm was round her now but she laid her hand again on 'Zekiel's; and then, though her hand was trembling and her face was white, she laughed half-shyly up at the poor fellow and spoke as if no danger to herself had happened.

"Let him go now, please, 'Zekiel. I think you have pretended fierceness long enough to frighten him to good behaviour. Poor Samuel!"

It was hard to keep the wrath at its height in the face of a gentle amusement which overlooked the seriousness of it. 'Zekiel's anger had ebbed swiftly out of him in the recognition of the little lady's danger, and now he only said quietly: "He can go safe, for all I care, miss."

Sam'l'e, with his head in a whirl and his feet uncomfortably near the edge of the unsteady plank, heard none of the words which passed, for the wind blew them far from his ears, nor did he understand his own release nor the doings which had followed it; but when he saw the squire and Miss Ursula turn and walk back to safety, followed by 'Zekiel, he walked back also, allowing only a prudent space between

himself and his oppressor out of the cautiousness which had been born with him.

"You was too boldacious, Sam'le," cried one, as he set foot on land again. But Sam'le was white-faced and disinclined for conversation, and the crowd, as a whole, seemed to have lost its levity for a while in the recollection of the scene just passed, and the sight of the chief actors in it going their several ways.

"You are trembling, little woman," said Master Humphrey, drawing Ursula's arm through his as they climbed the hill to the Parsonage.

"How he has changed! Poor 'Zekiel! One would scarcely know him for the same 'Zekiel," she mused aloud, not heeding his action or his words.

"And all because——"

"He loves the strange girl," she interrupted vehemently. "And who can wonder!" she added more gently.

He did not answer her but his thoughts went back to his last meeting with the Spaniard, and he pitied 'Zekiel, but himself he blamed; and with the blame came some sense of shame, and when they reached the door of the parson's room he hesitated, for the same feeling was on him as when he had said to Ursula: "I am not fit! I am smirched!"



But she, turning and seeing the hesitation, smiled confidently back at him. "Come," she said, with the gracious little manner she wore when playing hostess. "Come, for did I not wash the dusty hands quite clean?"

And so they entered the beautiful place together.

## CHAPTER XI.

**I**T was the squire's Christmas barn dance to which he had bidden Teresa. The dance which was held in Pensallas big barn every Christmas Eve as surely as the sermon was preached in Landecarroch church on Christmas Day, and for which neither perfection in, nor, indeed, the most primitive knowledge of, Terpsichore's grace was any condition of invitation or acceptance. All Landecarroch was bidden, and all Landecarroch responded to the bidding.

On more than one Christmas Eve the dance had been stayed and the laughter hushed by news of a ship in distress hard by, and the youths and the men had exchanged the hold of a sweetheart's hand for an oar or a rope, and the holly-wreathed barn for the furious sea. On more than one Christmas Eve, too, the best suits of the men and the gowns of the maids had born signs of long wear and short purses, for times were known to be hard and money scarce in Landecarroch, and, verily,

to live sometimes was no easy matter. But nobody fretted greatly over suits and gowns when the fiddlers struck up their tune and the dance began; and the lanterns in the barn shed always a most kindly light on rubbed seams and 'kerchief darns.

Now, on this Christmas Eve, the old building was glowing with many lanterns and jumping firelight; the walls were bright with gay hangings, wreaths of holly were twined about the rafters, and the pale, meek-seeming mistletoe was not forgotten, for, from the middle of the roof, a huge well-berried bough hung low to gladden the eyes and the hearts of the bolder lovers. The musicians—two violins, a 'cello, and a double bass viol—sat together on a small, raised platform at one end of the barn, and accounted this as important an occasion for sustained effort as the morrow, when, from the church gallery, they should lead, with much the same congregation to follow, the full-throated cry of "Glory to God in the Highest!"

A wonderful gamut of life it was, lining the old barn walls; from serious-eyed infants in their mothers' arms, capering children brimming over with an undefined jollity, boys and girls enwrapped in the bashfulness of their tender teens, youths and maids, comely and high-coloured, flicking conscious, half-shamed glances upwards to the mistletoe, to men and matrons, looking upon the

ways of youth with lenient eyes, though somewhat sobered by the cares of life, and, perhaps in consequence, more appreciative of the good fare if less eager for the dance, and white-haired granfers and grannies who sat and gossiped, and judged correctly the value of warmth and plenty, and who, having outlived all uncomfortably strong emotions were, perhaps, the happiest of all.

Master Humphrey was there by the door, of course, to greet them as they came, and take their good wishes in return; and every Landecarrook eye beamed pride upon him and admiration, varying in expression according to the age of the face it looked out from; the young ones, whose past was short, deciding, "Never was there such a comely squire!" the old ones, recollecting his infancy, thinking, "Law! how fine an' comely he've a grow'd!"

Ann Vitty was there in a gorgeous flowered gown, brought in a far back year by a sailor son from foreign parts, and with intuitive tact had seated herself on a bench beside Daniel Laskey, giving him the support of her familiar presence in this, his annual plunge into society. At the beginning of these evenings Ann Vitty's head was always held somewhat stiffer, and her conversation fell always into a somewhat more formal tone than usual—more prone to platitude, as being in keeping with the unaccustomed grandeur of her toilet. But these stiff-

nesses wore away as the time passed—indeed, she had fairly got the better of them this evening before the company had all assembled.

"'Tis a fine sight!" she remarked. "An' I always says the same, 'tis a fine an' blessed sight to see so many faces, young an' old, gathered together."

Daniel was feeling the responsibility of dialogue at his time and was rising to the occasion.

"Yes, Ann," he agreed, "you'm right."

"An' to think we'm all spared', ceptin' Thomas Capel's boy, to meet together here again——" Her eyes were roaming round the room in gratitude and appreciation of her fellow-creatures, but, at that point in her remark, they chanced to fall on the big, ungainly figure leaning against the opposite wall, and, at the sight, Ann Vitty became her own self again and finished somewhat irrelevantly. "Your Sam'le over there looks a bit pale-faced an' peaky, Dan'le."

Daniel, who chose to ignore the rumours which had drifted to him of his fifty-year-old son's late danger, answered grimly: "Cuttin' a tooth, maybe."

Ann Vitty could have enjoyed the parent's opinion of Sam'le's adventure, but, knowing Daniel's ways, she only ventured the remark that, "He do look weak, poor soul sure enough."

"'Tis kindly of Master Humphrey to provide 'en

with a wall to lean 'pon," said Daniel dully. There was no encouragement in his tone, and Ann turned again to the crowd.

"An' the parson, too, an' Miss Ursula! Dear old gentleman! he's hearty enough in his peaky way. Why, he must be getting on for——" then she ceased for a moment and caught her breath. "There, now, I'm blessed if there ain't that foreign maid come in 'long with Mary Ludgven! Well, I never did! Who'd a-thought it!"

And the last remnants of Ann Vitty's self-consciousness fell away before the shock.

In the midst of all the simple, glad-faced Landecarrocks the foreign girl stepped forward, and looked as a sun-touched fire-fly might look in the midst of a swarm of homely moths. And at that moment the fiddlers drew their bows across the strings in the first notes of a monotonously lively overture, by way of warming the blood for further efforts, and, hearing it, Teresa stood still, quivering with the measure of the music, and allowed Mary to go down the room alone.

As the air rose and fell, drawn from the instruments by the proud, perspiring musicians, she turned with a glowing face and looked towards Master Humphrey.

"He is to dance with me!" she thought with a confident triumph. "And——" glancing about her contemptuously, "it is certain there is no other in the company fitting to dance with him."

"Will 'ee dance with me, Teresa?" It was 'Zekiel's voice which interrupted her; he had drawn close to her and his eyes were pleading though his voice was restrained.

"No," she answered sharply, guessing his question rather than hearing it. "No, I do not dance with you."

The trace of her blow upon his cheek had scarcely died away, nor had the bruise of the remembrance of it from his heart, but his love was as strong and limitless as ever; there was no alloy in that.

"Teresa!" he pleaded, "won't 'ee give me just this bit of happiness?"

"No," and she frowned imperiously as her eyes wandered again to Master Humphrey. "No, I will not dance with you."

'Zekiel saw the direction of her glance and he turned away in bitterness.

When he had gone Teresa looked after him with fierce relief and some contempt, but, as she watched the little scene which followed his departure, it is certain she did not altogether like what she saw.

Agrimony—"that hateful, laughing maid!" standing beside Job Carvath in her rosebud cambric gown, with her unruly curls tied fast in a knot of pink ribbon, and her dark eyes dancing—with those same quick eyes of her's saw 'Zekiel meet his refusal, and, as he walked away from the foreign maid, she turned impulsively to Job.

"Go 'way from me, Joby," she begged him. "I'll dance with 'ee twice for it by-'m-bye if you'll go 'way from me now."

"For why?" asked Joby, with some resentment at the maid's sudden caprice. But Agrimony was in nowise given to needless mystery.

"Why, my dear soul, I want to make 'Zekiel Myners dance just this one through with me," she answered, with a broad smile which robbed the act of its flagrancy, "an' vex the foreign maid."

Joby began to see the situation.

"Hev 'er served 'en bad?" he asked.

"Served 'en like dirt beneath her feet," she declared.

"An' you promise me true, twice by-'m-bye?"

"True's I'm here," she promised, and he walked away and left her solitary.

Quick as thought she followed 'Zekiel and stood before him.



"'Zekiel Myners," she said, all sorrowful and long-faced, "did 'ee ever see the like of that?"

"The like of what?" asked 'Zekiel, without pretence of interest. The sight of Agrimony did not please him; she recalled the pain of that day by the beach, and he had pain enough without that.

"Why, Job Carvath, he's been and walked away an' left me, an' just as the dancin' was beginnin'——"

Through 'Zekiel's own unhappiness there filtered the thought that this maid was going to sob and that he must do something to stop it. He looked down at her civilly enough, but without much spirit.

"Shall I fetch 'en back to 'ee?" he asked.

"He wouldn' come," she faltered, "an' there isn' no time. Oh, 'Zekiel Myners!" she cried, clasping her hands as the fiddlers waxed more energetic, "oh, I couldn' miss it, not whatever!" She put out her little hand to him, "I'll do as much for you some day. Do 'ee, co'."

In a dazed sort of way he took her hand in his and they moved forward together, and though the glance which Agrimony sent across the barn was but a flicker of the lids, it was long enough to show her that, undoubtedly, the foreign maid was not pleased.

Teresa raised her chin a trifle higher and looked again for Master Humphrey.

But Master Humphrey, gay-hearted, smiling, and hospitable, did not glance towards her ; he was playing his part of squire and host in the manner which his guests, with one exception, admired and expected of him. As the musicians settled down to the well-known changes of the rollicking tune, he made his way towards Dame Tellam, sitting buxom and important beneath a festooned Union Jack, the three-inch miniature of a departed parent heaving upon her black silk bodice, and, taking her hand, he escorted her to the top of the room that she might support him in opening the proceedings by leading off in the boisterous intricacies of the country dance.

Teresa paled with the shock of her surprise, which was, for a moment, sharper than her anger. But as she watched, as she saw the couples form themselves in two long files down the middle of the room, as she heard the music rising and falling, saw the men and maids join hands, step, curtsy, glide, and cross, all light of heart and light of foot, absorbed by the pleasure and the measure of the dance, whilst she, Teresa, stood apart and unnoticed, her fury burned hot, and her straight brows lowered above her glittering eyes.

"He desired me to come," she raged within herself. "He desired that I would dance with him, and I am

left to stand alone, while every clumsy village fool is dancing!"

And the sight of 'Zekiel aggravated her chagrin; her fury included him. That he should dance—that he should dare to dance, while she was left to stand alone!

And was ever a dance so long or so hideously merry as that dance? Was ever music so wearisomely lively? Were there ever such monotonous repetitions of melody and gesture, as of this melody and these gestures to Teresa's ears and eyes as she stood chafing under her mortification?

And the jollity of Master Humphrey as he crossed arms, bowed, and *chasséd* along with his ponderous partner, was as a breeze to the flame of her fury.

"Dance with him! I will not dance with him! I will not speak with him when he comes to me!" And her teeth were fast clenched as she stood and watched him.

At length the final crashing chords sounded from the fiddles on the platform, and the panting, laughing couples spread themselves and made towards the benches and the settles for rest and the recovery of their breath, some maids affecting dizziness on the way, thus securing the support of a muscular arm about the waist, some spurning such support with make-believe affrontedness when placed there uninvited. And Master

Humphrey laughed and breathed quickly as the others, as he led Dame Tellam back to her seat, but he did not look towards Teresa.

After some minutes, and much chattering, the fiddles wailed forth the notes of a second dance, a statelier performance, and of a slower pace; and Teresa waited, with blazing cheeks and wrathful eyes, for the coming of the squire, that she might deal him the blow of her refusal. Then the company rose to its feet again. Agrimony was claimed by another swain; the children separated themselves from their elders, prepared to play the part of audience in this more serious performance; but still Master Humphrey did not make his way to Teresa. With laughing eyes and deferential air he made his bow before Ann Vitty, and craved the pleasure of leading her to the place of honour at the top of the square.

Teresa had not learned the customs of these Christmas dances, nor the rules of precedence laid down by tradition, and her wrath grew difficult to hide. 'Zekiel, whose eyes craved to see laughter on her lips when so many lips were laughing, and who suffered in her mortification as she suffered, had no heart for pleasuring if she were not pleasuring too. He sat where Agrimony had left him and he watched the girl he loved with unrest in his eyes. Then the sight of her

lonely figure nerved him to brave her anger again, and as the dance was forming he rose and went across to her.

"Dance with me, Teresa?" he implored.

She turned on him as if he had torn at her wound. "Silence!" she commanded; "I do not dance this night!"

He did not betray his pain, but he did not move from her side. He could not bear that, in the midst of their Landecarrocks' pleasurings, the girl he loved should stand apart and lonely. It stung him, and she, even in her anger, felt some comfort in his nearness.

When the second dance was over, and the dancers were holding their hands to the heart-side of their bodices and fanning their heated cheeks, the untired children were to be rewarded for their inaction by one of Landecarrocks' favourite games, which included chanting and capering to the accompaniment of the fiddles; and, as arrows from a bow, they shot from their seats and formed themselves into a ring in the middle of the room. Then Teresa left 'Zekiel's side and crossed to where Mary sat with Zel in her arms.

To-night the Madonna-like calm which had been driven from Mary's face through the past months seemed to have come back to it. She was wearing

a gown of a pale grey colour, and round her neck and shoulders lay a soft, white 'kerchief, fastened with a brooch of twisted gold — Peter's first love-gift to her in the days of their wooing.

Through the first dance Ann Vitty had given lap-room to the younger Ludgven, and Mary had stood up to step it through with Peter, just as in the old days before she was his wife, and the very act had seemed to set things right again, and her heart was easier; the doubts and fears seemed to have shrunk away to nothings, and she watched the children now with the old peace lying in her eyes.

Seeing Teresa coming towards her she made room on the bench beside her, and for some moments they sat there together in silence and looked upon the antics of the children, as they were led by Master Humphrey and Miss Ursula. Even when angry exclamations broke from Teresa, Mary could not understand them; she could see that the girl was enraged but she could not guess the reason.

When the frolic was over the parson stepped forward to his grand-daughter as she stood by the squire, and then, turning to his people, he spoke a few words of Christmas hopes and Christmas wishes, with a beaming smile upon his thin face; and then he bade them all "Good-night," and took Miss Ursula

away with him, for the parson's hours were early, morning and night, unless his flock had need of him.

It was when the fiddlers were turning their pages, for another dance that Master Humphrey turned to look for Teresa. His duties were over for the time and he intended to fulfil his part of the promise which he had asked and she had given. He had just been holding Ursula's little hand and wrapping her white frieze cloak about her, and a certain gentleness which had then come into his face and his voice had not left them as he came to Teresa where she sat by Mary's side. But as the girl saw him approach she stiffened in her wrath and set her teeth hard upon her nether lip. 'Zekiel, with eyes which he could not force himself to draw from the two figures, saw the meeting, and his temples throbbed near to bursting, and a mist came before his eyes, a mist that seemed to grow denser, until, even in his pain and eagerness, he wondered, and shut his lids to break the film; but when he opened them again the mist was still before his sight.

"I must claim you for the dance now, Teresa," said Master Humphrey softly, as he bent towards the girl.

But for answer she rose to her feet in voiceless

passion ; she clenched her hands as if to strike him down before her ; her eyes flashed——

The mist before 'Zekiel's eyes was rising in a little cloud now, and above the tuning of the fiddlers his voice rang out.

"Fire!" he cried, and for a moment the barn was silent with an awful hush.



## CHAPTER XII.

"FIRE!"

The ghastly word burst as a great echo from the people, breaking the hush it had caused, and, as the cry left their lips, the blood seemed to drain from their faces and go with it. With wide, horrified eyes they all rose to their feet and looked at 'Zekiel. But 'Zekiel was passive and unruffled, and he was looking at Teresa. Quickly their eyes followed his; they, too, looked at Teresa, and then they saw!

Up the flimsy hangings which draped the wall behind the angry girl there was darting a great tongue of flame, which branched, and crept, and trembled, up and along, then pausing, then leaping, then broadening, leaving a fiery trail as it went, which glowed, and curled, and shivered as if it were alive.

In an instant Master Humphrey had clutched at Teresa and had swung her back into the middle of the room, and, leaping on to the bench, was pulling at the

flaming draperies, trying to drag them to him and crush them in his arms. But the fire was spreading its quick, yellow tongues above and beyond his reach, licking its way from flag to flag, hurrying with a ghastly, noiseless hurry. And it was then that panic fell upon the watching company, and a sudden, shrill lament broke from their throats, gripping their courage, as it struck on their own ears, so inhuman it sounded and so disconsolate.

"A ladder! Water!" shouted Master Humphrey, but his voice was drowned in the clamour which followed that first cry—the frenzied shrieks of the children, the terrified wails of the women, the confused shouts of the men—as they turned, some forcing, some forced, in one great rush towards the door.

"Ladder!" shouted Master Humphrey again.

Peter Ludgven who had seen his need was already upon his way, but the help was useless, for, having once reached the open, it was impossible to return. From the middle of the room to the doorway a mass of struggling persons was pressing forward with a din of imploring, hysterical, terror-stricken voices—a din for which no word has been coined, which pierced the ears of the mind and echoed there for ever. And if ever there came a lull in that awful sound of absolute fear, there could be heard now the dull,

more awful roar of the flames as they leaped on their way triumphantly.

"Give help here, Myners!" shouted the squire, as his eyes fell on 'Zekiel at the back of the surging crowd. But 'Zekiel paid no heed. The fire was nothing to him. He was not in a mood to care for danger or pain; he had lived beyond them. He only knew and felt that here was Teresa, close to him, shuddering, frantic, with her anger shocked from her; and his heart leaped.

Dragging her back and catching her fiercely to him he cried in triumph: "You'm my maid, now, darlin'! My darlin'! You'm mine! I don't care! If we'm burnt to cinders, I don't care! I don't care!" And he crushed her in his arms in his furious passion of joy.

But Teresa had no desire to be his, nor to become a cinder. Panic-stricken, bewildered, maddened by his hindrance of her, she shrieked in terror and rage, and tore and fought herself from his hold, turning back to the crowd in a wilder frenzy than before to beat, and tear, and force a path, until the end of the swaying mass closed round her and she went from his sight. Then 'Zekiel's arms fell slackly to his sides, and, for a time, it was as if he stood desolate in a solitary place.

And the cries of the crowd went on untiring, and

the shouts of the squire, commanding order and common-sense, were drowned as they left his lips, and the smoke grew dense and the air hot, and the smell of the burning and the sound of it were to the nostrils and ears as if they had always been, and the lurid, yellow tongues grew fiercer, licking and darting from wall to rafter, and the flaming wreaths and the charred drapings dropped on to the press of choking, fainting, struggling persons below. And those who chanced to be nearest saw that the little door set in the big double-doors was their only hope, for their own weight barred them from the unfastening of the big doors' bolts.

"'Zekiel Myners! Wake yerself up and don't be a fool!" A little figure in a smirched and torn rosebud cambric frock pulled him by the arm and shook him with all her trembling strength. But 'Zekiel, looking at her slowly, only stood the firmer, and then she knew what was in his mind. A wave of despair broke over her as she glanced wildly round and saw the flames ever hurrying nearer. It was so awful to stand still and talk slowly with death at her elbow. But that must be done if it was 'Zekiel Myners' life she was after.

"Why'm 'ee a fool, 'Zekiel Myners? You won't be best pleased with the feelin' of frizzlin' to death when it *do* come." She forced her stiff face to smile with a pitiful levity. "Do 'ee think you'll look pretty when

you'm roasted?" The rafters were crackling overhead, the wall near to her was glowing. "You'm thinkin' 'twill make a fine tale for the foreign maid to hear, to set her crying? You'm thinkin' she'll be sorry for 'ee? Just to have her sorry for a minnit, what's that worth?"

"She will be sorry," he said softly and rapturously, and Agrimony guessed his words.

"But she won't!" she cried ruthlessly. The smile on her lips *would* grow faint, and, feeling it, she forced her throat to laugh though her voice shook through it, and made the laughter come in ugly jerks. "She won't be sorry. She'll come 'long to the old barn when 'tis safe an' cold, an' she'll make sure to have another sweetheart with her—p'raps one more to her taste than you; an' p'raps she'll stoopy down an' pick up a bit of cinder—p'raps 'twill be you an' p'raps 'twont—an' then the other sweetheart will, maybe, speak somethin' pretty to her, an' she'll forget the cinder betwixt her fingers, an' she'll turn her great shinin' eyes on him, like as if he was the only man on God's earth."

She had stirred 'Zekiel at last. He looked at her wildly, and a groan came from him, but he did not budge as she pulled at his arm.

The smoke and the heat had become terrible. Agrimony felt as if her heart would choke her; her

words seemed to grow hard and painful in her throat. For a moment she tried to make-believe she was on Landecarroch beach, with the icy-cold wind in her face, and the drench of an angry wave on her scorching flesh. It was desperate work to stand calm and slow-speaking, when every pulse in her body seemed to be forcing her to turn and save herself, but she saw the advantage she had gained, and when words would not come she fell to laughing.

Then 'Zekiel turned on her. But Agrimony faced him insolently.

"She'll have forgotten 'ee," she tittered.

"She won't never forget me," declared 'Zekiel, clenching his hands and blazing his eyes on her.

Seconds were precious now. The flames were glowing on her bare arms. Truly it was a fellow-creature's life she was bidding for, but would she have bidden so persistently for Job Carvath's life? Job Carvath was being swept on in the crowd so there was no proof to be brought.

In desperation she made her last attempt.

"No, she won't never forget 'ee," she agreed, with a sudden sadness in her voice. "She'll grieve, an' grieve finely, when she sees yer poor dead body. But 'twill be her sweetheart what 'll point to me, as I'm lyin' here beside 'ee, an' 'll say: 'Zekiel Myners knew how to make

the best of his time ; he took good care to have a maid with 'im to the last.' An' then her pretty face 'll grow white an' sorrowful, an' her tender heart 'll break to think you was but fickle after all——"

"Fickle !" Agrimony had won her desire. "Fickle !" he cried. "My God ! an' for the likes of you !" He tossed off her hand from his arm in his wild pain, and, dashing forward, was soon mingling with the surging mass which pressed ever on towards the escape which seemed so far away.

And Agrimony stood quite still where he had left her, and the rigid laughter-lines were still about her lips ; and then, quite slowly, she looked upwards at a fiery festoon of holly hanging ready to fall, and then all suddenly she sank to the floor in a little huddled heap of rosebud cambric.

Half-way towards the doorway Mary Ludgven, ignorant of the fate of husband or brother, swayed with the swaying human mass, her baby still in her arms, crushed back against her breast. She did not cry out, and the press of the crowd forbade her moving forward or backward except as it willed, but her face was white as death, and "Peter ! Peter !" she implored in soundless words through her stiff lips. She guessed that 'Zekiel must be behind her, so many feet further from the chance of life, and the look which was set hard on his face when

last she had seen him gave her an added pang. Before her, struggling, gasping, crying aloud in her terror, she could sometimes catch a glimpse of Teresa as she fought her way inch by inch towards safety.

At last, at the little doorway, she caught a sight of Peter, and though his face was haggard with anxiety, his voice was cheery as he cried out—

"Nobody's goin' to be burnt if they only takes it sensible, an' comes out 'cordin' to the size of the door. Don't 'ee crush so, you folks. Keep up yer hearts!" And then he strained his eyes along the surging faces in search of his own folks.

Mary could see him now and again as she was swayed from side to side, and her love seemed to leap in her throat. "Peter! Peter!" she uttered faintly, the smoke well-nigh choking her as she drew each breath. But Peter did not see her. She tried to lift Zel high that his eye might be caught by the movement, but her arms were fast pinned by the press, and the little fellow wailed with the pain of it. And then the crowd forced her aside and he was lost to her sight again.

At length Peter's eyes fell on Teresa as she fought her way on, with blazing face and starting eyes.

"Where's Mary?" he demanded hoarsely, as the girl neared him.



"Mary gone—safe!" she declared, crying the lie aloud in her terror. "Peter, I die!"

When, through the smoke and the glare, Mary Ludgven caught sight of Peter again, she could see that he was not looking for her; his eyes were shining on Teresa, and she saw him lean forward and take the girl in his strong arms, then bear her, clutching and clinging, away to safety and the cool, free air. And she, his wife, and his little child were left to faint, or struggle on, or die alone! He had forgotten her!

Death had been awful when faced so closely, but the awfulness of death faded into insignificance before the bitter anguish which fell on Mary's soul as her eyes looked upon the scene framed by that little doorway. Above the clamour she had not heard the words; she had only witnessed the desertion. Peter was gone; and he did not come back.

"Zekiel!" she murmured piteously, and in her pain she strove to turn towards him, but the crushing, panting bodies prevented her. To go back was impossible. Husband and brother had forgotten her. That wild creature from the sea had stolen their hearts and their senses from them. And her little child—the only thing left to her—was wailing and sobbing with the pain from which she could not shelter him. Her white face grew awful with its look

of deep-graven agony ; her brain throbbed fiercely, and it seemed as if each smoke-charged breath must be her last.

It was Master Humphrey who carried her out into the biting night air at last, just as she felt her senses leaving her, and placed her on a little grass slope beyond the crush and the trampling, bringing her a bowl of water to revive her before he left her to go back himself and give more help.

"Save 'Zekiel!" she said slowly, in a quiet, dazed way ; "mind and save 'Zekiel!"

"Nearly every one's out now," said Master Humphrey ; "and we'll soon have out the others. You rest here, and I'll send Peter to you ; he's tending the faint ones."

But the sound of Peter's name sharpened her senses again, and the pain came tearing back at her heart. She could not meet Peter yet. She could not bear to suffer his tardy aid. Tottering, stumbling, shaking in every limb, with her baby weighing down her aching arms, she crept away from the glare, and the smoke, and the noise, into the darkness of the night, with only a great longing for the shelter of her own home mingling with her heart-pain.

And when she had dragged herself up the hill and reached the little white cottage, she entered in and

closed the door ; and then a piteous moan broke from her. But she did not shed tears. After she had stood a moment in the darkness, she went to the hearth and stirred the embers till they quickened to a cheerful flame. Then she lighted a candle, and looked about as one looks who has returned after a long journey.

On the table lay the spray of leaves and berries which Teresa had designed for her dark hair but had discarded at the last. Across the arm of the settle hung Zel's little night-gown, warm and ready for his wear ; beside it lay Peter's sou'-wester, as he had thrown it aside before starting for the squire's dance. Everything familiar, everything as it had been left a few hours ago. How very long ago it seemed !

A sleepy wail from Zel roused Mary from her thoughts, and, sitting down before the hearth, she undressed the tired baby-body and hushed it to sleep in her arms, as quietly as if there were no shadow athwart her life.

But when Zel had sunk to sleep she laid him in his cradle, and blowing out the candle, sat by the uncurtained window in all her pretty finery and looked out, as if in waiting for the coming of the dawn. But her eyes saw nothing that lay beyond their lids ; they were looking wide and full upon her misery.

### CHAPTER XIII.

**V**ERY few worshippers climbed the hill to Landecarroch church that Christmas morning. In almost every cottage there were pains to be borne which would not be ignored—jealous pains which brooked no divided attention, scarcely allowing, indeed, for decent thankfulness that, as yet, all lives had been spared.

From Daniel Laskey, lying with a broken rib in his cottage down by the boat-sheds, to Miss Ursula's little maid, Agrimony, waving her blistered arms, as she tossed deliriously on her little white bed up at the Parsonage. From Dame Tellam's staff of maids sobbing or swooning in Pensallas kitchen to 'Zekiel Myners moaning in unconsciousness from the blow of a falling plank in his little room beneath Betty Higgins' eaves, there was woe indeed in Landecarroch this Christmas Day.

Soon after daybreak Master Humphrey had galloped

back from Haliggan—where he had ridden off, all smoke-grimed and exhausted as he was, as soon as the fire had been got under—closely followed by the cheery little doctor, who had hurried from his warm bed and renounced his Christmas fare and festivities to ride along the bleak backbone of the downs to Landecarroch at the squire's bidding, without a thought that he was somewhat of a martyr for so doing. And together they had gone from house to house, easing the sufferers and heartening those who had escaped sound-bodied; while the church bells pealed out the message of Peace and Good-will in a sadly disjointed fashion to their ears, for five of the ringers were sitting at home with their arms swathed in linen and oils.

Never before within Landecarroch memory had the old church walls failed to ring with the rousing, whole-lunged notes of the Christmas hymn or echo with the words of the parson's Christmas discourse. But on this woeful day old ways were broken through. There had been a disaster—a disaster which, if not exactly "national," was a deal more absorbing; and when, before he opened his prayer-book, the parson turned to his scanty congregation and spoke a few words of comfort and sympathy to them as Landecarroch folk, before he addressed them as Christian

brethren, they took it most kindly, and no one questioned the innovation. The old man's words touched the hearts of those who had found custom too strong for them, who had left all the trouble and excitement of the village behind them and had climbed the hill to listen to him, and they brought out their large Sunday handkerchiefs, and sniffed, and dried their eyes without any affectation of concealment.

The singing, however, was but a dreary affair, for the voices were few, and they trembled as they "pitched the tune" unaided by the customary wails of the stringed instruments. There was but one musician in the gallery, and he, being "bass viol," had no spirit to court attention as a soloist. "'Twould have seemed like fulsome pride," he remarked afterwards, "an' I hadn' no stummick for the work."

And the Christmas dinners were neglected as the whole-bodied tended their sick, and the walls of the squire's barn were still smoking sullenly, and the shock of the fire seemed to rest upon the face of the village.

Mary Ludgven, going to and from her home and 'Zekiel's sick-room, was the only one who volunteered no words on the matter of the fire and its ugly work. Peter had found her still sitting by the window when, with Teresa clinging to his arm, he

came back to tell her of 'Zekiel's accident, and she rose without a word or a cry to go to him. She looked terribly white, and her great heart was sick and desolate; but above her pain there came a curious thankfulness that here was something for her to do—hard work which might ease the unbearable misery. Peter put his arm about her quickly as she swayed on first rising to her feet. "Thank God!" he murmured, and his voice seemed a sob. "Thank God you'm safe!"

Mary did not throw off his arm, or turn to reproach him; she stood white and passive for some moments, looking still, with unseeing eyes, out through the little window. Only when he kissed her she raised her hand and slowly gripped the white 'kerchief which lay so softly over her aching heart. She did not blame Peter; with fine justice, she told herself, that he could not prevent the power of the dark girl's bewitchments. But that realisation did not bring comfort or hope to her. Peter could forget his wife and his child when their lives were in ghastly danger, and could rest content to clasp his arms about the girl who stole his senses.

Peter, looking at her with troubled eyes, did not guess at the pain she was bearing.

"She's dazed with things," he thought, as he walked

~~Lead~~ her to Betty Higgins' cottage and watched her unmoved face as she looked upon 'Zekiel lying there unconscious.

Teresa, left by herself in the kitchen, grew somewhat irritated at the desertion. She had undergone much fear and danger, and felt that she had a right to sympathy; but Peter and Mary had gone from her without a word or a look, hurrying away to pity and gaze upon 'Zekiel, who was stunned and could be none the better or worse for their pity or their gazing. When she had watched husband and wife out of sight, she turned to look at sleeping Zel, her only companion, and for a moment contemplated shaking him into wakefulness, but on reflection she decided that such a course would not better matters, and, leaving him in peace, she made her way into Mary's little larder, where she comforted herself to some extent with the materials she found ready to her hand. When that distraction had lost its first charm, she climbed the stairs to her own little room, and went to bed. The events of the night had tired her as a child is tired after a fit of passion and a fright, and she was soon fast asleep—in a sleep as childlike and untroubled as that of Zel, lying in his cradle in the kitchen below.

And Christmas Day wore on—with strange, unreal-



seeming hours, and the biting cold of the night turned to a heavy clamminess, and the wind shifted round to south. When the short afternoon was drawing in, and the last sufferer had been eased, the doctor stood in Master Humphrey's room and swallowed a hasty meal as he waited for the saddling of his mare. Then he mounted her and turned her head homewards, cheerily promising to come back next day.

To the turn by Betty Higgins' cottage Master Humphrey walked beside him, and spoke of oils and bandages, and such like subjects, but at that point he bade the little man "Good-bye," standing to watch his odd little figure in the big brown cloak he wore, as the good mare set her back for the steeper bit of work before her. Then, instead of facing down the village again, with a sudden impulse, Master Humphrey turned the corner by Betty Higgins' cottage, and going along the back of it, by Ann Vitty's fuchsia bush, walked slowly on and up towards the Parsonage.

It was Ursula who opened the door in answer to his knock, and she gave a little exclamation of gladness when she saw him standing there; so, although he had not known before why he was there, nor what he meant to do, he followed her without demur to the parson's room.

"Does the little maid go on as we hoped?" he asked, as they stood together by the hearth.

"She is better," Lizabeth says, quieter and more like to sleep. "Lizabeth is with her now, and sent me away lest I should talk—lest *she* should talk, I say." A faint smile crept into her anxious eyes. "And grandfather—he is in the village amongst the people, and I—was all alone, and——"

"And scared by your own company," he declared, with a short laugh. Laughter did not yet come very easily to either of them; the laughter-lines seemed to have become stiffened by the stern things which had faced them since they had parted in the barn.

"I was glad to see you," she admitted, half-shamed at her own past timorousness. "But please rest, Humphrey," she added, quickly, as she looked at him and noted his face in the soft candle-light.

He was still wearing the caped riding-coat which he had hurried on while waiting for his horse to be saddled so many hours ago, and as he sank into a deep chair and laid his head back, she could see that he was white and haggard, and his eyes looked weary. The big lamp which hung from the roof had not been lit this evening, but the candle-light showed the pallor and the lines of weariness.

"I am not in very fine trim to come into a lady's presence," he said quietly.

"You are weary," declared Ursula, saying his excuses for him. "And——" she added, "I think that you are hungry."

"Hungry?" he repeated, doubtfully. "Hungry?" Then, turning to her with something of his own laughing look: "I believe you are right. I am just hungry."

"When did you eat last?" she enquired, with a pretty severity on her face.

"Ah! when?—I cannot remember. I think it must have been in some former age. Some time before that ugly flame ran up the wall and burned the big gap between yesterday and to-day."

She stood up again, and looked at him with her old-fashioned little air of hospitality. "You must have some food," she said; "I will bring some to you."

"I believe I wish for some very much," he admitted, "now I lay my thoughts upon it. Let us go together and hunt for some; I used to storm a larder with excellent results."

"You are so weary," she protested.

"No, so hungry," he corrected, as he rose and followed her.

In the larder they found 'Lizabeth's store of Christmas

fare ranged upon the shelves, and Master Humphrey, being allowed free choice, favoured a capon pie and a neat's tongue.

"I feel myself growing back to such a boy—oh, such a boy!" he whispered, as with the pie in one hand and the dish of tongue in the other, he tiptoed his way to the kitchen, preceded by Ursula bearing a loaf of bread.

Ursula laughed softly. "Must I then grow back to baby girlhood?" she asked.

"I see no necessity," he declared. "I do not profess to set examples. I but prove a rule occasionally."

In single file they went from cupboard to linen-press, from dressers to dining-room, collecting table-cloth, knives, forks, plates, glasses, and a decanter of good red wine, talking in whispers and laughing softly as they went lest 'Lizabeth's quick ear above stairs should catch sound of them, and her sense of duty force her to forsake her post by Agrimony's side.

"Phew! The heat of this evening is unbearable!" exclaimed Master Humphrey as they reached the parson's room again. "'Tis as if that barn of mine had scorched the whole land."

He laid his collection upon the table, and flung off his riding-coat. "May I open a window?" he asked.

"Ah! yes," assented Ursula. "Why should we

pant for air, when there is a whole worldful of it beyond the walls?"

But it seemed as if there was not a worldful of it beyond the walls. Master Humphrey kneeled upon the window-seat while his small hostess set the table for his meal, and he leaned out into the darkness, but the world outside was close, and hot, and airless. He tried to pierce the blackness that closed up beyond the bar of soft light which shone out from the room behind him, but he could not distinguish the horizon. And the sea itself, which had splashed its breakers up the cliffs with a crisp "swish" when he had listened to it last, while arraying himself for the dance the evening before, now struck with a sullen, muffled boom; while above the slow sound of it there came a peculiar sucking noise, as if the lips of the waves were draining the shingle on Averack beach.

"I do not fancy this weather for Christmas," said Master Humphrey, as he turned back to the room again and obeyed the wave of Ursula's little hand.

He was really monstrously hungry, and the pie was, indeed, most excellent. Then, too, the sight of Ursula at the other end of the small table was extremely pleasant to his eyes; he insisted that she should share his feast, for, he declared, he had become surfeited with loneliness and could not bear another solitary meal.

And Ursula, with a pretty mingling of courtesy and childishness, yielded to his insistence, and took the plate he held to her, with a gracious compliance.

It was but a one-course meal, but much time was spent in the partaking of it. Ursula, to whom the scene was something new and unusual, in her own mind fell to playing it out in that undefined land of hers where all romance took place. To her the parson's room became the gem-set chamber of the palace, the plates were gold, the glasses pure crystal, and Master Humphrey must, perforce, do duty as the imaginary prince. To Master Humphrey, who guessed none of her imaginings, the scene was good enough as it stood; that half-shy queenliness of hers was most engaging, and he did not care to hurry to the end of it and break the spell.

The interruption came at length by the sound of the turning of the heavy handle of the outer door, and in another minute the parson was in the room, and they saw him turn, with courtly hospitality, to welcome a guest who had accompanied him. Rising to their feet they, too, turned towards the door, and then they saw that the newcomer was the foreign girl, Teresa.

"My dear," said the parson, turning to Ursula, "the village folks are over-busy bearing their pains or ministering to the pains of their neighbours, and I

fear that this poor stranger-maid has been somewhat forgotten. I found her wandering alone, seeming desolate and uncared-for, and I brought her to our home that we might minister to her comfort for a while."

Ursula stepped forward and half held out her hand to draw the stranger to the hearth, but some impulse checked her, and, instead, she drew a chair towards her and smiled a welcome to the girl. But Teresa's eyes had fallen on Master Humphrey, and, at the sight, she stiffened, and Ursula's welcome was wasted.

"Ah, Humphrey!" said the parson turning to the squire, "I am pleased to see you here resting at last. You have undergone much since we exchanged our Christmas greetings in the poor old barn. May I ask you to remain here a while and assist Ursula in her entertainment of the stranger. You know her language and will be invaluable; and I, myself, have still some visits to pay amongst the sufferers."

"I will stay gladly, sir," said Master Humphrey, as he looked from the parson to the two figures by the hearth. "I will stay until your return." For some unreasonable reason the sight of Ursula and Teresa standing there side by side did not please him, but he preferred to stay and look at it rather than go and leave them together.

"Thank you, Humphrey," said the parson, and in

a few moments his gaunt figure was moving down again through the outside darkness towards the village.

"You will eat, Teresa?" asked Master Humphrey, as he went forward to set a plate and a glass for her.

But Teresa's eyes had left his face, and were now moving slowly over the wonderful walls of the parson's room. She was seeing the colour and the beauty of them for the first time, and the points of light where the facets of the gems, and the quartz, and the crystals caught the shine of the candles and the fire. In some curious manner the gleam, and the sparkle, and the strangeness of it all seemed to excite and intoxicate her. A quick transition of mood came over her as she looked; she was setting aside her anger and her resentment, and again was feeling the full measure of her power.

Looking at her Master Humphrey was reminded of the night on which she had come to him at Pensallas and had fallen absorbed in the beauty of her surroundings. He stood and watched her in silence until Ursula touched his arm gently and reminded him of hospitality. Then he went closer to the Spaniard. "You will eat, Teresa?" he asked again.

She turned her dark, pleasure-steeped eyes upon him. "Ah!" she sighed, "how it is beautiful! beautiful! beautiful!"



"Come," he urged, "there is some merit in this pie also," and he placed a chair before the plate which he had set for her. With a quick, excited spread of her hands she came to the table and watched him as he placed food upon her plate and poured wine into her glass.

But Teresa did not eat. She took the tall glass and drained the wine, and then, still toying with the stem, she turned quickly from side to side to look again upon the wonderful walls.

"Alas, we did not dance together!" said Master Humphrey at length, interrupting her absorption, from his seat by the open casement.

At that she turned on him. "No," she answered, "we did not dance together." There was no apparent anger in her eyes, but they were glittering strangely. And Ursula, from her little oak chair by the hearth, watched her half-fearfully.

"The fire was ill-timed," he laughed.

"The fire was—as hell," she answered. "But it was not fire which stayed my dance. I did not dance that night."

"You dared not display your powers before us?" he questioned, still laughing.

"I dared not!" she cried, her eyes flashing and her brows lowering. "Dared not! You say I dared not dance! You—you heavy-footed English!"

"You, at least, have given us no proof of your own light-footedness," he persisted, amused.

At his feigned incredulity she started from her chair, and for a moment both Ursula and Master Humphrey held their breath.

"You say I—I from Spain, dare not dance!" she cried, clutching at the long, scarlet scarf which was lying loosely wound about her shoulders. "I will show you if I dare not dance! Dance as no leaden-footed English could dance—no, not in their dreams!"

She stepped quickly to the space of bare, polished floor at the farther side of the room, and catching the hem of her full, scarlet skirt and the heavy fringe of her scarf dexterously in one hand, she twined the other end of the scarf about her free arm, and raising one foot slowly, began to lilt a weird, measured air. In another moment the notes quickened and grew louder, and soon the girl was swaying, turning, waving, twisting, in all the graceful intricacies of a Spanish tarantella.

In the whole of her short life Ursula had seen nothing so wonderful before. She sat looking with fascinated eyes upon the whirling figure, and listening with entranced ears to the strange, quick notes of the girl's voice. The sight seemed to fit the unreal mood which was lying with full power upon her this night.

In imagination she was far from Landecarroch; the gem-set room lay in some opulent, unnamed city of the far East; the swaying, whirling form before her was the favourite slave-beauty of the palace, brought here to dance for her—Princess Ursula's—pleasure, the music was the music of merry days and light hearts.

It was wonderful! It was exquisite! With absorbed, dilated eyes she watched as one would watch a dream-vision, conscious that it must vanish if but one waking thought should creep into the mind. And the scarlet figure whirled on madly, and the gem-set wall behind it gleamed and glittered with the movements, as if each facet were a living, admiring eye; and the quick voice lilted on, with a slight tremor as the breath came quicker—a tremor which only served to strengthen the spell, the witchery of the scene, and set the listeners' blood coursing in their veins. And the little Landecarroch lady sat enthralled, bewitched, as for the first time she saw her wonderful imaginings crystallised into shape before her waking eyes.

Curious changes were passing over Master Humphrey's mind, as he sat silent by the open window. He did not once draw his eyes from the dancing girl, and the moment of amused suspense he had felt when she rose from her chair, quickly gave place to admiration

—full, unstinted admiration, paid to the perfection of the performance. He had looked on Spanish girls at their dancing before this night, but this dance and this girl were unlike anything he had seen before. The smiling lips fascinated him; the glittering eyes held him. His very senses seemed caught in the whirl of the scarlet draperies. But as the minutes passed, a vague distaste crept across his mind; the dance, though beautiful and finished, half-troubled him. It seemed evil; the vivid, alluring figure seemed wrong, whirling so madly in the stately beauty of the parson's room. It struck him as incongruous, and, by degrees, he hated it, and, in his uneasiness, half-rose, instinctively, to try to stop it.

Then, all suddenly, the quick lilting was over, and the girl's voice fell into a slow, wild song of her tribe, a passionate, appealing incantation, and her feet moved slowly to the new measure.

Fascinating as the tarantella had been, this strange music held in it something far more weird and mysterious. There was no need now for the little dreamer to picture unreal things with the eye of her mind, the reality was sufficiently wonderful. This room which both listeners knew so well, became suddenly unnatural—strange to them; as if in past times they had seen it through a veil. The treasures of the walls

stood out with a curious distinctness ; the atmosphere grew heavy and suffocating ; there seemed to be no air left in the world ; an invisible weight pressed down upon them ; and yet they did not draw their eyes from the girl, but watched her, feeling that some strange thing must happen, and that they must look to her for the signal.

Then, as they looked and listened, they heard her passionate cry ring out wildly ; they saw her spread her arms high towards the domed roof ; and then, with terror on her face, she sprang forward, and the room was filled with a blaze of light which played around them all, and trembled, and then went out, leaving them again in sudden gloom.

Then came a rattling crash, as if the roof were splitting under the fire of artillery. And before the rattling had ceased came another blaze of light, followed by a booming roar, as of a hundred harvest-waggon breaking into a mad race for life across wooden bridges overhead.

Master Humphrey and Ursula sprang to their feet, but Teresa had already rushed from the room, and, hurrying after her, they saw her pulling madly at the handle of the outer door. Before they reached it, however, she had opened it, and was speeding through the darkness.

Flash followed flash, and roar beat upon roar, and in the light of the quick flames which jerked across the sky, they could see her making for the cliff; then without a word they took hands and raced after her through the tumult of the night.

They found her on her knees at the cliff-edge, pointing outwards across the water.

"See! See!" she whispered hoarsely. And they looked.

In the quick blaze of light which brought the very foam-lines into distinctness, they saw, far out upon the waters, a ship, large, and black, and of a curious build. Then the blaze went out and they were in darkness again. But darkness was as light to Teresa, for the ship was pictured plain upon the retina of her eye.

"See! See!" she repeated. But the words came slowly now; her terror was gone, and she gazed as one spell-bound.

There was no need to go or call for help; the ship was not in distress; she was moving slowly on her way through the night and the storm; and, answering some imperative impulse, Master Humphrey and Ursula kneeled upon the short turf beside Teresa, and, looking out to sea, waited for the flashes as they came to light the scene. It seemed, then, as if there were nothing

else in the world worth doing but just to kneel there and wait for the quick, fleeting glimpses of the black ship. And in the darkness their cheeks burned, and their eyes were strained, and never a word was spoken except those slow syllables by Teresa, as she still pointed seaward, and whispered: "See! See!"

And the thunder crashed across the sky, rattling and roaring, and the night lay hot, and airless, and heavy upon everything, and the world seemed as a battlefield on which deafening and terrible deeds were wrought in the darkness by vast, invisible armies. And an hour passed, and still they kneeled and watched.

At length the flashes came less frequently, and the rattle and the roar faded into a muffled booming; and by-and-bye, as they still crouched, waiting, there came the sound of footsteps on the turf. Then Master Humphrey roused himself and spoke.

"Who's there?" he called. And the parson's voice came in answer.

"There appears to me to be a certain bodily risk——" he began gently.

"Ah! we are watching a ship—a strange ship!" interrupted Master Humphrey, in some excitement. "No wreck, but a most strange vessel."

"Ah!" commented the parson, and he stood

beside them, and with them waited for the next flash of light.

But the storm was passing, and they were forced to wait long, even over-long the waiting proved, for, when the next flash trembled across the sky, there was no ship lying up against the horizon; it was as if it had passed with the storm, and the sea-line was bare from headland to headland, and from breakers to sky-line there lay nothing but a waste of heaving water.

"Come," said the parson, "she has gone upon her way; let us also go upon ours."

For some moments the three kneeling figures knelt on, filled with a strange wonder, finding no word to fit their tongues; then they rose in silence and obeyed him.

"Humphrey," said the parson, "if you will favour me by escorting Ursula to the Parsonage, I will myself see my young guest safely back to shelter."

"I will," said Master Humphrey slowly, as if his own voice were new to his ears.

And turning to take their separate paths they heard the faint boom of the distant thunder as it travelled away into space, and they felt a fresh little breeze puff in their faces, and the smell of the turf rose and mingled with the smell of the sea.

Down in Betty Higgins' cottage, 'Zekiel, in his delirium,



was cursing the black ship and her ghastly crew which had thrown the Spanish girl upon their shore ; and Mary, listening to his words, felt that he only cried aloud the dumb cry of her own heart. But the cries held widely different meanings.

## CHAPTER XIV.

**F**OR a week or more Landecarroch decided daily that Daniel Laskey would never go into his tidy churchyard again, except feet foremost on the shoulders of his neighbours ; but at the end of that time Daniel Laskey decided for himself—and otherwise—once more baffling everybody by doing the thing which had not been expected of him. And the little doctor, standing wide-legged, with hands in pockets, smiled broad approval of the decision ; and even Sam'le at last ventured his scared face, with its anointed blister by the nose—trace of the falling mistletoe's fiery kiss—round the lintel, to peer furtively at his parent.

Up at the Parsonage, too, Agrimony lay with swathed arms, moaning her way back to life. And it seemed that the whole of the village was healing gradually. There were but two exceptions to this pleasant state of things ; one of these was the barn itself, which stood, charred and roofless, gaping up at the sky, and pro-

claiming itself incurable; the other, 'Zekiel, who still tossed on his bed at the whim of his fevered brain.

For a fire, this fire had been somewhat merciful; and gradually the village turned its face from its scars and drew breath, and looked about it, and found that it had been making Landecarro history—painfully, but undeniably. This was, indeed, a new topic to be talked over by the look-out, by the boat-sheds, by Ann Vitty's fuchsia bush; though the first gatherings were but dismal affairs on account of the gaps in the assemblage.

Perhaps Ann Vitty and Luke Tregay felt this dismalness more than most of them, for Ann Vitty's *salon* had been held with greater frequency and longer duration than the others, and her fixed assembly had been more select. She and Luke missed Daniel Laskey as no one else missed him; indeed, his absence seemed more striking than his presence had ever been, his vacant place against the wall seemed to smite their eyes, and their topics sounded unfinished lacking his comprehensive "H'm!" as their metaphorical coping-stone; that empty silence at the end of their remarks was desolate in their ears.

"Old folks *is* old, Luke, an' there's no denyin' of it," sighed Ann Vitty, as she leaned over the wall, in

a rare gleam of winter sunshine, and flashed her knitting needles through the baitings of her long blue stocking. "Dan'le's mendin', they say, but it do bring it home to anybody that the poor dear must go 'fore very long; an' we'm bound to do likewise, in the course of natur'."

Luke, with his eyes fixed mournfully upon the drooping fuchsia stems, assented. "Iss, 'tis true, an' only what's to be expected. We've a-lived long lives, as lives is counted nowadays, nort but a flea-bite to Meethoosla an' such as he, but full lives for them as has to 'bide by newer fashions."

"Poor Dan'le! I always considered he was one as thought a powerful lot of his end, quiet-like, to hisself. But, law me! such like ways often seems to keep a man livin', I've a-noticed."

"P'r'aps you'm right; any way, Dan'le wanted all he could get to keep 'en livin' this time. Doctor said 'twas a mortal bad smash-up, sure 'nuff."

"I've often thought on it since," went on Ann Vitty reflectively. "'Twas strange—mortal strange! Some of the folks do say that the fire springed right up from the foreign maid, an' some declare 'twas the blaze in her eyes as struck the first spark. Whether they'm right or wrong 'twas a queer matter. Nothin' like it never happened so afore."

"No, my dear soul! 'Tisn' like Landecarroch ways to be over-trubbled with fire-heat in the winter," commented Luke, with a jerk back of his memory to winter days which had been over-trying to the marrow in his bones.

"I say agen, as I've a-said afore," declared Ann Vitty, "I don't much fancy the maid, an' if I was Mary Ludgven I'd sooner be without her. She's got a pair of heathenish eyes, whether or no they'm able to fire a barn; an' the way she's a-been an' bewitched poor 'Zekiel Myners is enuff to make a body turn cold. Look at the poor boy any time since that maid comed 'pon Averack beach, and cast yer mind 'pon what he was afore! Fire or no fire, she's a-got ways about her that isn' goin' to bring no good to nobody, an' I wishes her well out of the village."

Luke had nothing hopeful to bring forward in answer to Ann's tirade.

"Seems to me," he remarked, with mournful anticipation, "there isn' no likelihood of her goin' away; she's no manner o' maid to go for service, an' Peter Ludgven isn' the man to turn any creetur to doors if they was wantin' to stay."

"Bless 'ee, no! Peter won't turn her away! Let that maid look 'pon any man, be he married or single, an' he'll go straight an' do her biddin'. Do 'ee think I can't

see her tricks? There's a devil in her, that's what I say, an' there's more trouble to come. If so be as we lives long enuff, we'll see 'Zekiel's jetsam pay 'en back as jetsam alwise does—trouble 'pon trouble, if 'tis nothin' worse."

"She isn' altogether what you'd call jetsam," ventured Luke, hazarding a ray of hope upon Ann's dark future. "'Zekiel didn' ezactly draw the maid out from the sea as you might say."

But Ann was not to be cheered.

"If he'd a-draw'd her straight down from the stars, 'tis my belief 'twouldn' ha' made no difference; the maid's possessed. To my mind Landecarrook's never bin the same since she comed. Did ever you mind a winter same as this winter? I can't never mind such a one. I've a-known 'em mild, an' I've a-known 'em short, in my time, but nothin' like this. Why, there hasn' a-bin a touch of cold in the air since the fire blazed up back 'pon Christmas Eve; an' heavy!—you can a-most weight it in yer hands."

"You'm right," responded Luke, with a slow shake of his head. "Us got brave an' hot that night, an' us haven' had no chance of coolin' ourselves off since. 'Tis blow 'pon yer fingers to cool 'em, 'stead of chafin' yer chillblines, as you haul down yer sails."

"Maybe 'tis savin' in the matter of firein', but 'tishn'

natural ; an' somethin' 'll come of it, whoever lives to see it."

"Somethin' 'll come of it." Each man and woman in the village felt the same thing, though they might not all have Ann Vitty's leisure or spirit of prophecy to put it into words. It was 'as if some heavy, intangible thing were hanging over them, waiting to fall and crush. They had known storm, and stress, and death, and dearth in other years, and time and time again hunger had come to their doors, and had stalked inside, too, but never before had this gloomy foreboding come and wrapped them round, and pressed down upon them.

"'Tis the weather," declared Peter Ludgven, determined that if his cheerfulness was to die as other people's it should die hard. "'Tis the weather what's makin' us so wisht an' down-danted—weather an' poor catches."

No one felt equal to proving Peter wrong ; and, certain it was, that, instead of the furious north-easter which they knew so intimately, lashing their cliffs and sweeping across the land, the air was still and heavy ; a damp, sodden smell rose from the earth, and fog, fog, fog, lay everywhere, wrapping the hills, hiding the cliffs, lying low upon the sea and the land, hanging in beads upon the bare trees and bushes ; creeping into the cottages, into the ingle-nooks, into the very throats of the villagers ;

and the sea lay out to meet it—a dull grey, heaving stretch, sullen and ugly ; and man, and sea, and land seemed gloomily waiting, grimly expectant.

At last something did come, but that was trifling, and nobody paid any heed to it. Something else came soon after, which caught and held all their powers of thinking and feeling, and doing. But this first small thing came so quietly, so unobtrusively ; not in a tearing whirlwind, or a blinding snowstorm, or a crashing thunderbolt, such as every villager felt would be a fitting form of arrival into the midst of their gloom. It came floating over the heaving grey water, with the languid, immature waves flop—flopping against its small wooden sides, towards the damp shingle of Averack beach.

Nobody saw it as it bobbed its way out of the fog on the sea towards the fog on the land, for the only human being anywhere near was Master Humphrey on the cliff above, and his face and his thoughts were turned towards the Parsonage. It is true that before long there was another human being equally near to the wooden thing bobbing its way from sea to land, but her face and her thoughts were turned towards Master Humphrey.

“ Ah ! ” she sighed softly as she came out of the fog towards him.

“ Teresa,” he answered.

“ Why do you go up and up ? ” she asked gaily. “ I am



going down." She was such a child to-day; her lips curved in such young smiles; her eyes were so innocent and dewy, as she pointed to the cliff path which led down to the beach.

"I was on my way to the Parsonage," he explained.

"It is not good for you to go there," she declared.

"I think it is," he laughed.

"Ah, I mean—it is not good *of* you," she corrected.

"Ah!" he agreed, "that is another matter."

"I am going down," she said again, and she still pointed one small brown finger down towards the beach.

And then she turned her dark head and looked up at him sideways; and then she raised the dark arches of her eyebrows; and then two bright little specks came and danced in her wide eyes; and all the while there was silence.

And she had never before appeared so child-like in Master Humphrey's sight.

And Master Humphrey had a kindly heart for children.

And then she faced towards the path down which her finger pointed, and Master Humphrey followed her down the zigzag to the beach.

And the wooden thing heaved on the dull sea, nearer and nearer, with the impotent ripples striking it weakly as it passed by, as if they found themselves

too feeble to prove the strength of their objection, till at length they hurried it on to the swell of a listless breaker, and the listless breaker, faint with anxiety to be rid of such a burden, slid it down to a dispirited neighbour, which, in its turn, tossed it languidly upon the shingle, and slowly sank back after the exertion into the arms of its fellows, leaving the burden stranded on Averack beach.

Teresa saw it first.

"Look!" she cried. "Quick, look! What has come to us?"

"Another Spanish maid, perchance," laughed Master Humphrey, as he ran with her to the water's edge.

"But tell me," she demanded, kneeling and passing her quick brown fingers over the wet wood, "why does it come so?"

Master Humphrey smiled and shook his head. "Landecarrocks sees many such treasures from the sea drift to her beaches," he answered, as he lifted one end and dragged it higher up the shingle, "but they seldom tell us why they come."

"Open it quick, quick!" she commanded, beating her hands together in her impatience. "I must see the treasures!"

"No——" began Master Humphrey, as he kneeled and examined the thing.

"No——?" she repeated angrily.

"It would be——"

"Open it!" she commanded, and then they stood upright and faced one another—and, in a minute or so, a fair-sized pebble seemed sufficient for the work.

This treasure from the sea was an oblong little chest of black wood, fastened almost invisibly at every join; but, on its voyage, it had struck a rock, it seemed, for on one side there was a large dent in the wood, and at this spot Master Humphrey found the fair-sized pebble sufficient to finish the work of staving-in.

"Good!" cried Teresa, as in her eagerness she fell upon her knees and pushed in front of Master Humphrey. Then she thrust her hand into the hole to clutch at the treasure.

Whatever she had expected to find—coins, or jewels, or ornaments of gold and gems—what she touched surprised her. It was something soft and yielding, and, closing her fingers upon it, she drew her hand quickly back again, and looked upon a crumpled end of yellow silk which she was holding—vivid yellow, soft and shining.

Master Humphrey rose to his feet.

"Better push it back and leave it for Peter," he

said, as one advising a child in the matter of sharp-edged tools.

"Leave it!" she cried, "for Peter! It did not come to Peter! I—I, myself, first touched it!"

"You were taking away Peter's work," he assured her.

"But it is not work I want to take away," she said scornfully, "it is the treasure. It is mine! It came to me. I saw it first. Look! Lovely! Gold!"

With all her smiles come back again, she pulled at the end she held, and drew out from the chest yard upon yard of the soft, shining stuff.

"Ah!" she sighed, as she came at length to an end, and buried her hands in the silken mass.

"You must put it back," declared Master Humphrey.

"No," decided Teresa.

"Yes," said Master Humphrey.

"No," repeated Teresa.

And then she lifted the yellow folds, and twined them about her dark hair and her shoulders, and smiled out at him from her vivid hood.

"There is much more in the box," she said quietly, as she rubbed her cheek against the golden softness.

Higher up, through the fog, came the trill of a

whistle. It was Peter's whistle ; and, as they heard it, they looked at one another.

"Put it back," said Master Humphrey again.

"No," said Teresa.

With a new line—a stern one—showing between his eyebrows he stepped towards her, and put his hand upon the silk about her shoulders. And now they could hear Peter's footsteps coming down the path to the beach. With a jerk of her shoulder Teresa threw off Master Humphrey's hand and sprang away from him.

"Listen!" she said, and she raised her finger to command silence, while Peter's whistle came trilling again through the fog. Master Humphrey looked at her but said nothing.

"Listen again!" she commanded. "To me. This is beautiful, and I will have it. Peter is coming; he need have neither work nor treasure," and moving quickly to the little chest she lifted it in her arms, and, running to the water's edge, flung it as far as her strength allowed, out into the sea; and a single splash came back to them through the fog.

Then she turned and faced him, smiling defiantly, with all her pilfered glory wound about her. But the defiance went out from her face as she looked. Child-moods are short-lived and very winning.

"Come!" she whispered coaxingly, holding her hand to him. "Come!"

And he turned and went with her.

When Peter, with the fog-beads standing out on his rough coat and his curly hair, came looming through the smoky denseness to the water's edge, the beach, as far as his eye could penetrate, was empty and silent; and the line of dull, grey sea heaved slowly with the ebbing tide, and told no tales.

But stealing away towards the village, in the golden folds about Teresa's dark hair and slender shoulders, something had come to Landecarroch at last.

## CHAPTER XV.

“YALLA silk !”

Landecarroch folk gazed and gasped, then blinked, and gasped, and gazed again, and three quick breaths went to the exclamation as the Spaniard danced past them in the fog. Then a score of questions blurted themselves out, for Landecarroch folk had been somewhat overpowered with incident lately, and were suffering from a surfeit of amazement ; but all the while they knew that their questions could not be answered, for, when all are enquiring, who would exalt himself and turn instructor to his equals ?

But at length, with one long breath a word was ventured—the word which had been chafing in their skulls so long.

“’Tis witchcraft,” declared Ann Vitty, and Landecarroch turned to her in fearful gratitude. She had put their dread into sounding syllables ; and, ghastly though it might be in their ears, a common danger was better to bear than an individual terror.

“Mother !” exclaimed Betty Higgins, squeezing her

youngest baby, Charity, in her nervousness, till that infant squealed protests. "How can 'ee say it?"

"'Tis witchcraft!" repeated Ann Vitty, bolder now that the word had once sounded in her own ears; "an' I've alwise misdoubted as 'twas so."

"Yalla silk!" they breathed, and they all turned their heads one way to peer into the fog.

A wild mood had come to Teresa, as if with the touch of her new mantle, and her yellow figure danced on now, past the villagers, as if the heart inside it were too light for sober ways.

A group of listless children were moping round about a grindstone at the top of the village, and as the Spaniard reached them, she caught them one by one and swung them round, rippling out pretty laughter as she saw their wondering faces; then she chased them gaily, and merrily flicked them with the shining silk, then spun them in its soft folds, and released them again all giddy and breathless.

And in a while the mad mood infected the children, too, and they loosed their down-drawn lips and laughed out shrilly, and joined in this fun which had fronted them so suddenly. And the elders, hearing the laughing clamour, followed their own eyes into the fog, and then stopped, startled, and widened their lids, and looked upon the wild doings.



The stranger-maid who had always shunned them haughtily, and passed them by with never a word or a smile, was now frolicking as a child amongst their children, darting to and fro in the midst, chasing, catching, whirling their plump, sturdy-legged sons and daughters as if they were so many butterflies, dancing with them, swooping upon them, entangling them in the long folds of her gold-coloured drapery. And the children, wild with the excitement, drunk with the joy of it, skipped, and ran, and darted, too, shouting, laughing, clamouring, as if tasting pleasure for the first time, and mad with the excess of it.

And the elders stood where they had first halted, gaping and awed, and looked upon their little Landecarrocks boys and maids as if relationship had been wiped out, and they were looking upon strangers. And the minutes passed, and still they stared on, fascinated, with no power to claim or to command these pranking little figures.

And then, quickly as she had come upon them out of the mist, the Spaniard whirled her yellow draperies and danced away into it again, leaving them frisking alone. Four or five of them danced after her, thinking this but a new phase of the delightful frolic, but she was quicker than they, and soon out-distanced them, never once turning her face back to them as she sped into

the denseness. Then all the frisking ceased, and a sudden wondering silence fell upon them, and they grouped themselves again about the grindstone, looking cheated and chapfallen, and then they turned their heated little faces to their elders, and looked silly also.

For many hours after this, a spirit of unrest lay upon the young of Landecarrock. They had tasted the sweets of a strange, incredible pleasure which had been snatched from them again, leaving them mortified and unsatisfied; and now they grew peevish and fractious, and found their old life tasteless, and colourless, and dull. Not until the next day did they recover some of their interest in affairs and bury their longings and their mortification in forgetfulness. Then, as they dawdled apathetically on Averack beach they chanced upon a little wooden chest with one side staved in, which had been washed up by the tide. The sight roused them, and having rounded their eyes and wondered a while, they turned it over and drew out from it countless sodden folds of some soft material, all dripping and stained. And when they had emptied the chest, and thrown the wet stuff aside, it seemed worth while to kick the little wooden thing from where it lay, and with the first kick their spirits rose, and they kicked it again, and further. The sport was good, exciting, and they grew quick and gleeful, and backwards and forwards they kicked the little

chest, from boy to girl, from girl to boy ; and their peevishness and their apathy fell away from them, and their laughter could be heard again rising up into the fog, until, in time, this game, too, seemed stale, and the labour profitless. Then they turned again to the sodden stuff lying upon the beach, and squeezing the wet grey-green folds in their tanned little fists, made reins of it for themselves, and played at horses on the shingle.

It was soon after this that the second "something" came to Landecarroch. And even this "something," though bearing such power with it, came without noise, or blare, or crash to herald it, borne gaily up the village street in the arms of the only creature who could be gay in the face of the heavy, dank gloom which oppressed the land.

The day was close, and grey, and misty, as all the other days had been since Christmas Eve ; dampness rose from the earth and dropped from the sky, as Teresa came laughing up the hill from the boat-sheds with little Charity Higgins in her arms. Charity's face was pale and her eyes were heavy as she lay against Teresa's shoulder, but Teresa's cheeks were glowing, her eyes were bright and dancing, and her lips were parted in child-smiles. And wound round about herself and the baby was the yellow silk, binding them together.

As the girl came on her way, tossing and rocking

the child in her arms, mothers looked from their doorways anxiously and scanned the pair, and they knitted their brows and straightened their lips. They hated the foreigner to fondle their children; they hated her to touch or look at them; in their hearts they knew her to be a "witch," and they shuddered as their eyes fell upon her. On this day, as each mother, looking from her doorway, saw that the child in the foreigner's arms was none of hers, she shrank back into her kitchen that she might not hold mouth-speech with the girl. And Teresa came gaily on, laughing and chattering her "heathenish words" to the child, till she reached the open doorway of Betty Higgins's cottage.

Betty was in her kitchen, and her heart gave a scared, great thump, and her lips trembled as she saw her baby in the foreigner's arms.

"Charry, my precious!" she cried, hurrying forward to claim her own. "Come 'long to mammy." And the baby, seeing her, struggled to free herself and stretch her arms to her mother.

"Lord sakes!" cried Betty. "What's the matter wi' her arm?"

She stopped in the act of taking the child and quickly pulled up the little flannel sleeve to the shoulder. A cluster of bright, red spots burned angrily

upon the baby flesh, and Betty's eyes full of horror, and Teresa's still smiling, were riveted upon them.

"Lord A'mighty!" exclaimed Betty, "what is it all? What 'vee been doin' to her?"

But Teresa only smiled on placidly.

"Stop yer grinnin'!" commanded Betty, "an' tell me what 'tis?"

For answer Teresa drew her finger lightly in a circle round the bright spots, and murmured in a cooing voice: "Ah, pretty!"

"Pretty!" repeated Betty indignantly, snatching Charity from the girl. "Little you'd care if they was plague-spots. Come, my blessed, tell mother what the wicked maid done to 'ee!"

But Charity only turned her face to her mother's heart, and moaned a little moan, half-peevisish, half-comforted.

Ann Vitty's words, "'Tis witchcraft," seemed to echo again, and the blood shuddered out of Betty's comely cheeks. She turned in quickly and shut her door, leaving the foreigner to smile on, if she pleased, upon the weather-worn wood of it, while she laid her baby in its cradle, and knew, and never doubted, that the cluster of bright spots meant death.

By evening-time of that same day a dozen or more of Landecarroch boys and maids left their play,

which had grown dull and tedious to them, and volunteered for bed a full hour before time, instead of cavilling about odd minutes, and haggling over the shadows and the tide-line, as was common with them ; these being the clocks which they and their elders never read alike.

And before long the little doctor was riding his good brown mare across the backbone of the downs again, peering at his way through the mist by the help of his big horn lantern. And when he reached the village his cheery face turned grave, for as he went from bed to bed he knew the place to be stricken.

Landecarrook folk did not say many words when they learned that Death was stalking their village ; they seemed to have been waiting so long for him, or some such visitant, that their sorrowful words had mostly been said. They had cried out when the fire had burst upon them in the barn, and conversation had not been slack on the subject afterwards, but when this new foe faced them they pressed their lips noiselessly, and did the next thing, hour after hour, with little comment, and only a grim look of waiting in their eyes. They had been better schooled for endurance than for sudden shocks.

Soon after the coming of the doctor, Peter Ludgven went to Betty Higgins' cottage and carried 'Zekiel back

with him to his own home on the hill. If 'Zekiel had to die it was thought better for him to die of his fever and weakness than of the loathsome sickness which lay upon Charity Higgins and the others, if such could be shut away from him. So Mary turned her face to 'Zekiel and to Zel, giving her time and her strength to the healing of the one and the protecting of the other. But Peter went outside again, for his work lay also in the world and amongst his fellows; and since it must be so, and he must go where there was danger, it seemed best to him that he should keep himself from those he cared for most; and his own home began to see but little of him after he had laid 'Zekiel upon the bed. Mary knew that he was wise in this matter; that it was all sensible and right; but she could not thank him for the wisdom, and the sense, and the rightness while her heart was so empty and desolate. And all the while Teresa, as some gorgeous insect that seems to find its pleasure in skimming over foul and stagnant pools, went to and fro, light-footed and light-hearted, up and down the hushed village, in and out of the houses of mourning, uninvited and unwelcomed, seeming to find her pleasure in the sights she saw and the sounds she heard. And Mary, facing the danger of the girl's wild goings and comings, held Zel apart from her,

and told her sternly of the risks she ran ; but her words seemed mostly unmeaning to Teresa, and the girl, whether understanding or ignorant, laughed in her face, and went her own way.

And the sickness crept on swiftly and remorselessly ; and above the hush which lay upon the village, soon there could be heard the tap-tap of carpenter Upjohn's hammer at work upon the coffins ; and Daniel Laskey, creeping out into the gloomy world again for the first time, with his newly-mended ribs behind his waistcoat, turned his steps toward his churchyard, which was now being so ruthlessly upturned by other hands, that the eyes at least of the master might be there to superintend the melancholy disarrangement of his treasured turf.

"The plague," the villagers called the swift vampire which hurried into their homes, and, seizing on their treasures, left them so near to human bankruptcy. "The plague" it was to them before ever the doctor had diagnosed it, and as he saw them sicken and droop before his eyes he did not trouble them with corrections, for he felt that no other word would fit it better.

"What's the meaning of all this, Ludgven ?"

Peter, talking with Daniel Laskey as he sat at the door of the cottage by his boat-sheds, turned as he



heard the words, and saw the doctor himself standing there with Master Humphrey at his side. Peter touched his cap.

"Do 'ee mean the plague, sir?" he asked.

"Ay, ay, the plague. What's the meaning of it? How did it come?" questioned the doctor.

"That's what we'm all askin', sir," replied Peter, with a shake of his head. "Every man, woman, or child as we sees a-droopin', we ask, 'What's the meanin' of it? How did 'ee come by it?' But, poor souls! they only twists in their mortal pains, an' then stiffens before our very eyes while we'm a-waitin' for the word."

"Strange!" mused the little man aloud. "I find no good enough cause for it. Landecarrook is clean as fishing villages are like to be—clean as it has been any time these centuries past, for sure. Any likely vessels been here at anchor? Any sailors ashore? Any cargoes landed?"

"Nothin' an' nobody," declared Peter. "Landecarrook's bin like a place forsook since Christmas-time. Like as if God A'mighty had a-cut us off from our fellow-creeturs."

And then there flashed a sudden, ghastly thought through Master Humphrey's brain, as he stood by listening. His face had been growing white and

haggard during the past gruesome days, but now the blood rushed to it and burned there, and buzzed in his ears, and made him dizzy.

"Doctor," he interrupted, trying to steady his voice, which sounded weak and far away to his own ears, "Could—could flotsam, or jetsam bring about such a pestilence as this?"

"Powers of hell, squire!" shouted the little man, "they'd manage it well, in truth! Yellow-jack, leprosy, plagues of every breed, bottled up with sack or rum, boxed in with fruits, tied up with grain, hiding in bales of cotton or chests of silk."

"Nothin's come our way, sir, since back afore Christmas-time," protested Peter.

"Yes, something did come." Master Humphrey seemed to drop the words from his mouth slowly and separately, as a man speaking a new language. "A little chest of yellow silk — washed in upon Averack beach. I know it, for I saw it, and I opened it."

For a minute they looked at him in silence; the doctor keen and curious, Peter amazed and expectant, and Sam'le, who had joined the group, slouching near to his father and staring up into each face in turn in loose-lipped fear.

"H'm!" ventured Daniel, breaking the silence.

Then in answer to the questions in their eyes Master Humphrey told his tale.

"Burn it!" cried the doctor, when he had listened impatiently to the end. "Burn it, and that quickly, too! But the maid—where is she? I can't call her to mind."

"She is well," declared Master Humphrey. "She has not sickened."

"*She* has not sickened!" echoed the doctor. "That seems to exonerate your little chest of silk. But," he added, more to himself than to them, "there's no knowing, those dark-bloods seem impervious at times. Can I see this maid and her silk?" he asked, turning to Master Humphrey.

"Yes," said Master Humphrey. "Come with me; I will find her for you."

## CHAPTER XVI.

'Z EKIEL was himself again, that is to say, he had given over raving of "black ships" and "cursed crews," and lay upon his bed sensible. For hours his wide eyes, which seemed as if they would never close again, had turned from Mary's face to the little casement, with hopeless, hungry glances; she had seen restless recognition in them, too. Then the parson came, and, standing by the bed, took 'Zekiel's hand and smiled upon him, and then 'Zekiel spoke, and his voice was strong, with a curious, hollow strength. It seemed as if nothing would weaken him, as if his passion for the Spanish girl flamed in him, with the fire of a fierce, artificial vitality which would not let him sink or die.

"Why didn' 'ee let me go?" he asked, looking up into the parson's face, with quick suffering and reproach in his own eyes.

"Let you go, Ezekiel!" repeated the parson.  
"Whither should I let you go?"

"Hell! Hell! It must be hell! God A'mighty wouldn' bear with me in Heaven. I couldn' worship 'En. I couldn' take no 'count of 'En, with my heart, an' my soul, an' my body all a-worshippin' an' a-longin' for her."

"We cannot spare you for hell, Ezekiel; think of it, lad! We cannot willingly let you go to suffer the tortures of the damned!"

"I suffer 'em now," he cried despairingly. "'Tis hell for me to live! 'Twas hell all the time I was seein' her. 'Twas hell when we was apart; from day to day, an' hour to hour, an' word to word. 'Twas hell! hell! hell! an' I can't rise up an' stir about in it again. I can't face it. I can't—Teresa! Teresa!"

He pressed his thin fingers hard into his eyes, and his body shook with the power of his pain. Mary, standing silent at the foot of his bed, bore each word's separate wring of torture, and she did not move or try to comfort him. She did not tighten her lips or close her teeth, as instinct teaches men and women to do to ease their pain; she only gripped her hands together and pressed them tightly over her heart—an impotent tourniquet to stop its bleeding or deaden its pain.

"Ezekiel," said the old man gently, "you are young

—young enough to be only brave. I pray you not to turn coward and crouch from the first blow that hurts.”

The tension of the boy's fingers slackened again, and his body lay quite still. The old man went on in a low, soothing voice, full of sincerity and a fine pity.

“God, a man has told us, has stretched a crumb of dust from Heaven to hell, and then, with a wonderful tenderness and mercy, has reached out His arms to meet it, if it will but float back towards Him, if ever so feebly. That crumb is man. Will you be too poor, too weak a man to raise even a finger, even a glance——?”

“I ain't a man. I ain't nothin' but a—a—lump of pain,” declared 'Zekiel.

The parson sighed a little. “We will wait for you—wait for you to take shape from out your lump of pain. It is possible that it may be quite splendid—that shape for which we wait. Ah!” he went on musingly, as if forgetful of his listeners, his tall, spare figure swaying slowly, his thin fingers interlaced, “in one's youth—how well I know it!—pain is so keen, so poignant. The thing on which a man sets his heart is craved for so passionately, and then, when it is denied, he cries out bitterly, angrily, and he turns and curses, and draws his eyes inward to his own black, hopeless heart, and says that the world is black and loathsome, dark as night,

hateful as hell ; and he wraps himself round tightly in selfishness. But by-and-bye, if he has a germ of real manhood—humanity—latent in him, that wrapping of selfishness, that chrysalis of cowardice, is broken through gradually, and the man, looking out, finds that the world is not quite dark after all. There is a twilight in which he can dimly perceive several desirable things still lying round about in it ; and then, even as he looks, the twilight lightens and the things stand out yet more plainly and seem yet more desirable ; and as time passes on he learns that the world is, after all, a fair spot still, and the light, becoming more radiant and more glorious, leads that man on to perfect day. Ah ! you are young, Ezekiel, you are young——”

The parson’s voice was pitiful and soothing, and for a while it seemed as if his words had been lulling the excited boy upon the bed, but with a quick, bitter cry ’Zekiel silenced him.

“Young ! Young ! Why shouldn’ I be young ? I don’t want to be old ! I want—I want—O my God ! —I want rest !” and, throwing out his wasted arms, he turned his back upon light and the living, and buried his face in his pillow, and knew despair.

A sharp rapping at the cottage door broke the silence which followed, and Mary turned, dry-eyed, and went slowly down the stairs.

In a curiously dull, unemotional way she noted little details of the room before her as she stood at the foot—the size of it, the colour of its walls, a drooping fuchsia-bloom in the window, the hot flush on Zel's cheek as he lay asleep in his cradle, the loose folds of yellow silk about Teresa's shoulders as she bent over him. Then the latch clicked and the door opened, and Master Humphrey stood on the threshold, with the doctor at his shoulder.

"Forgive us for troubling you, Mary," said Master Humphrey, coming forward, "but doctor has a wish to see Teresa, and the bit of silk she's wearing."

Mary moved her head in answer, and Teresa, hearing her name spoken, rose smiling from the cradle-side, and looked upon the visitors.

"Teresa," said Master Humphrey, turning to her and speaking in her own tongue, "doctor distrusts your pretty silk, thinking it holds the plague which is killing our people every hour. We want you to let us burn it——"

Teresa's eyes hardened as she heard him, and she tightened the silk about her shoulders, but her lips were smiling still.

"I think, Mrs Ludgven," said the doctor, turning in angry impatience to Mary, "that this cursed plague, as you call it, which is turning your village into a



charnel-house, is lying thick, like enough, in this maid's bit of finery——"

"A—h!" His angry words had stirred Mary at last. The dull despair in her eyes kindled to quick mother-fear, and, springing forward, she pushed Teresa roughly back from the cradle-side. "Take it off!" she cried. "Take it off this instant minute!" And she snatched at the silk to tear it away with her own hands.

But Teresa stepped back and smiled insolently into her face, as she gripped the soft stuff about her in her two small fists.

"Come, Teresa," said Master Humphrey with some sternness; and the doctor stepped forward also. But Teresa only looked from one to the other and laughed a laugh which mocked and defied them; and it seemed sufficient to stay their hands.

"Doctor, doctor!" cried Mary, "she's been fondlin' of 'en; she's been holdin' of 'en; an' I prayed her to let 'en 'bide."

"He is flushed," remarked the doctor, curbing his impatience as he leaned over the cradle and looked at the child.

With a sudden horror in her eyes, Mary caught up the little sleeping form in her arms. But with devilish maliciousness Teresa sprang before her, and, snatching

at the child, hugged him in a rough embrace; then, winding the yellow folds close about him, twirled airily round before them in bravado, and laughed aloud.

"Give the child to his mother," commanded Master Humphrey, gripping her by the shoulder. But she twisted herself from his hold, and stood for a moment holding the boy mockingly towards Mary, the yellow wrap still all twined about him.

"Let me have 'en!" cried Mary in her agony of fear for him. "Give 'en to me this minute!" And Zel looked at her with wondering, sleepy eyes.

But, "Ah, no, he love—me—best!" declared Teresa tauntingly.

"Loves you best!" echoed Mary, white with her indignation, as she held her arms to her boy. "Loves you better than his own mother! Come! my precious! my sonny boy! Come to mother!"

"See!" laughed Teresa, "how he love!" And, stepping back a pace, she held the baby loosely in her arms, watching him eagerly with her burning eyes, while Mary faced them, her blue eyes hungering and her arms outstretched. And then, in the moment of silence which followed, and while, instinctively, all lips were parted and no one dared draw breath, the baby smiled, and stretching his plump arms to the Spaniard, laid them about her neck.

"Ah, God!" With a bitter cry Mary sprang forward, and, raising her clenched fist, struck down the baby arms from their pretty holding. Then a sudden jealous fury leaped into her face, the touch of the soft warm flesh seemed to set madness running in her veins, and she struck it again and again brutally. And the child's wild cry of pain rang out sharply, and he turned and spread his little arms to his mother in his baby terror, but she only beat them down again.

The sight of the calm woman turned brute was overghastly. Master Humphrey sprang forward and caught her hands. "Mary, Mary, you are mad!" he cried sharply. And then the door opened, and Peter came in.

At sight of her husband the pent pain of months foamed out from Mary's lips in furious words. Writhing in her desolation, whipped to agony, she raved recklessly of Peter's desertion, of his love for the Spaniard, and of her own empty heart. While Zel sobbed wildly, and stretched his baby arms for pity, and real tears blistered his burning cheeks and splashed upon the silken folds which still bound him to Teresa.

For some moments Peter stood dumb before this raging wife, who seemed as a stranger to him, and his eyes were wide with bewilderment. Then "What's the meanin' of it all?" he cried at last, bringing his fist down

upon the table in stern amazement. "You'm mad!" He echoed the words which had fallen on his ears as he opened his own door. "What's this maid to me?"

"What's the maid to you?" raged Mary. "Everythin', an' I'm nothin'. She's stole my man; she's stole my child; she's stole 'Zekiel——"

"You'm speakin' false!" said Peter, with slow fury. Then he turned to Teresa, and, without a glance at her mocking face, forced the child firmly from her arms. "Take the boy, Mary!" he commanded, holding Zel to her, and the little fellow spread his hands to her again.

"Take him!" she echoed, "when he's chose her before me!" and she raised her clenched fist once more and beat down the baby fingers. "You've both chose her, an' I've done with both. Go to her, cherish her——" She stopped, and looked round upon them all. Peter, strong and angry, with the sobbing child in his arms; the doctor, puzzled and anxious; Master Humphrey, white and suffering—all had turned from her to the Spaniard, who had raised her hand, and, smiling still and defiant, looked back at them triumphantly and seemed to hold their souls.

"See!" laughed Mary, in bitter scorn, "see how the maid bewitches you! Every man looks upon her, an' every man loves her——"

"No man loves her," said Master Humphrey slowly. But Teresa raised her hand again, and from overhead came the passionate cry, "Teresa! Teresa!" and the parson's tread was heard upon the bare floor.

They all stood silent and listened, and the parson's voice could be heard in a dull murmur; and then again "Teresa!" came the wild cry overhead.

"'Zekiel's callin' the maid."

The words dropped on the silence so quietly that the three men started as if a stranger had come among them unperceived. From Teresa's face the smiles had fallen away.

"'Zekiel's callin' the maid," said Mary again. There was an intensity in her voice which gripped the hearing. They looked at her now, and the change in her awed them. All the fury and the violence had passed away from her, and she came forward slowly with her eyes fixed upon Teresa.

The girl met her gaze, and set her own eyes to shatter the power of it, but before the sudden force fronting them they wavered and then quailed, and she shrank back with a half-realised terror draining away her defiance. She tried to re-form the smiles about her mouth, to make the laugh sound in her throat again, but her mouth had stiffened, and her throat had narrowed. The woman coming so slowly

and determinedly towards her seemed all strength—and inevitable; and the quick, fearful recollection of an evil figure coming, just as strong and inevitable, nearer and nearer, across the Spanish plain, flashed suddenly through the girl's brain and broke her daring.

Then Mary was close to her.

Teresa stood rigid.

With slow, strong hands the woman took the loose ends of the yellow silk which had bound the child, and twined them tightly about the girl. Then, with a vice-like grip on each shoulder she turned the girl's face to the door, and slowly forced her from the house.

"I'm cursin' 'ee!" she said quietly. "Go!" And with a sharp cry of fear Teresa broke from her hold and ran out into the mist. And Mary closed the door. Then turning to Peter she took Zel from his arms.

"Doctor," she said, in the same tense, monotonous voice, "the child seems fevered. Will 'ee be so good as to look at him?" And the doctor stepped across to the settle as she laid her son upon it.

"Teresa!"

The cry rang out again from the bedroom overhead, but Mary was deaf to it now, and it was Peter who turned and stumbled up the stairs in answer.

Master Humphrey, with his eyes fixed on the closed

door, still saw only the flying figure disappearing into the mist, and heard only the ring of that last, sharp cry. His veins were running with fire and ice, and his head seemed over-heavy, but he was realising that the girl with her plague-wrap had gone out into the day, and that some one must follow and take it from her.

## CHAPTER XVII.

**A**ND Master Humphrey followed.

Teresa had run, but he did not run, for his head felt heavy as lead, and it seemed as if to run would be to trample upon it with his own feet. The hill rose as he stumbled on, lifted itself and lurched before his eyes. There was a nausea rising at the back of his throat which locked his jaws. And the mist dropped down and turned him chilly; and more than anything else in the whole world, he longed to halt and lie down upon the sodden turf and rest and rest, and rest, until all the trouble was over and done with.

But he pressed his head over his eyes which were aching, and he remembered that there must be no rest, no rest, no rest, no rest, no rest. And there was something something what he must do. What was it? Ah yes. The girl Teresa and her mother and father. He must help them.



He stumbled on down through the village street. He would have asked if the maid had passed that way, but there was no living creature with whom to exchange a word. The street was empty. The doors were closed. The whole place was silent but for the distant slow plashing of the waves down there in the mist by the boat-sheds, and—surely there was another sound in his ears—a short, monotonous rapping! Yes, of course; it was Carpenter Upjohn's hammer at work upon the coffins.

He found her at the foot of the village street, where the two roads branch—the one leading Pensallas way, the other down to the boat-sheds. She was panting, and trembling a little, too, and uncertain which way to take; but she seemed to have cast off that sudden fear which had stolen her strength and set her shrinking, for, as she saw Master Humphrey nearing her, she tossed her head with her old defiance, and faced him with blazing eyes.

"Give me the silk!" he demanded, and he did not glance at her face.

With her eyes still upon him she stepped back a pace, and, slowly drawing the long, yellow wrap, all sodden and limp, from about her shoulders, she wound it tightly about her left arm, leaving her right arm free.

"Give it to me!" he commanded again, advancing as she retreated slowly downwards towards the sheds.

She did not utter a sound, but, with her eyes still fastened upon him, as a panther gauging the moment for his spring, she moved cautiously, step by step, backwards, down the rough path. And step by step he followed her, until, in such fashion, they neared the cottage where Daniel Laskey sat at his door.

Then the path waved on either side of Master Humphrey; he could see it quivering, though his eyes were fixed upon the girl's left arm. It seemed that he was tottering forward. And he had not yet taken that wrap from her! It must be done now, quickly, if he meant to do it at all.

Straining all his muscles to cords—the muscles which had been growing gradually slack as wool—he sprang forward and seized her hands in his, and then there followed a silent and a horrible struggle—but it was short.

As Master Humphrey clutched at the yellow thing bound about the dark arm, he saw the girl's head bend forward quickly upon it; then a hot breath fell upon the back of his hand, and then he felt the sharp, burning pain of teeth tearing his flesh; he seemed to hear it, too, and the sickening sound was worse than the pain of it. His whole body was filled

with a sudden loathing which was abhorrent to him and unendurable; he could hear the sound growing louder and louder, and he understood that it was killing him. It became a roar, and deafened his ears; his wide eyes grew sightless; he felt his face grow damp and cold as death; his torn hand slackened its grip on the silk, and then he felt himself falling—falling—falling!

There was a crash upon the pebbles.

From away in the mist came an ugly cry of rage or fear.

Teresa, standing straight, and a little breathless, began to unwind the damp silk from her arm.

Crash!

A stone hurled through the air struck at her foot and scattered pebbles widely. Another sharp cry sounded on the dank air; this time it came from Teresa, and there was no fear in it, only anger. Snatching up a handful of pebbles, she turned furiously to face her foe, and saw Daniel Laskey rising painfully to his feet, with a threatening hand outstretched towards a large figure looming in the mist.

It was Sam'le, and his hand was raised again into hurling position.

In an instant Teresa had sprung towards him, flinging the pebbles wildly; but they scattered

themselves harmlessly, and even as he ran from her in terror, he sent the stone he held, whizzing back at her; and his aim was true, for it struck her sharply on the hand.

For an instant Teresa stood in ugly rage—uncertain. And then, the fiend which lived in her, prompted her to the evil work which brought her her revenge upon the frightened, slack-faced fool, shivering there in the mist and hating her, and brought it more swiftly and more surely, too, than any but a fiend could have conceived.

With a devilish instinct telling her what would be most hideous and most terrible to this half-witted fellow, she turned and faced the old man in his doorway, and, springing on him, she gripped him by the throat with her young strength, and then she brought her clenched fist down upon his head.

Daniel was terribly silent. He had ever been a man of few words, and his was no nature to bounce with emergencies. Once or twice he raised a feeble hand in defence, but Teresa beat it down again. And then, back through the mist came Sam'le to suffer for his sin. Nearer and nearer he came. He ran, he sidled, he halted, he stumbled forward, he stood, he wrung his limp fingers; but in all that he did he suffered, and no mode of advance brought ease with it. Sharp,

snapping cries of rage and torment broke from him. He writhed in his terror, his limbs shook, his eyes started, his lips quivered.

But he had to come closer and watch the ugly work ; a spell was on him—the spell which drags timid children to listen to an old wife's tales of murder and spectral victims, only to shriek aloud in the night at horror of the recollection. He had to watch ; therein lay Teresa's revenge. He was forced to watch, and he might not kill the demon who was torturing him, for Nature had held back many things from Sam'le Laskey, and one of these was courage.

When her fury was somewhat eased, Teresa turned and looked at Sam'le, and the light in her eyes sent him back swiftly into the mist. Then she turned again to Master Humphrey, and when she had looked at him for a moment she laughed. And then the sound of that laugh, and the sight of the two men close to her, so quiet, and huddled, and horrible, and the silence, and the chill, the pause, the stillness, the very smell of death in the air, filled her with a quick terror. It was as if she were alone in the world—alone with but one other breathing creature, one merciless man, always seeking, always drawing nearer and nearer to her across the plains, across the seas, through the mist, tramping—tramping !

Footsteps were sounding on the empty street beyond—footsteps coming closer. With a curious inconsistency born of her fear, Teresa tore off the long strip of yellow silk, the thing she had fought for, and desired so much, and, casting it down upon Master Humphrey's still body, turned and sped away from that horrible spot.

From either side of the beach came a figure through the mist; and one was quick, and small, and bustling, unconscious of the work lying so close to his hands, the other was loose-limbed, white-faced, terrified, creeping fearfully back towards the sight he knew to be there. And the doctor worked, while Sam'le shuddered, and each accomplished in full measure.

And as evening fell there was woe at Pensallas, for the whisper ran from maid to maid, as water down a slope, that the squire was stricken with the plague. And up in the squire's bedroom Dame Tellam took up her position, and snapped words at any who dared withstand her and hint of risk. Master Humphrey was her nursling, wasn't he, and the last of his race? And if he had to die, what did anything else matter? If she took the plague—and they all seemed set upon it—what matter for that? She had to die some day, and why not by the plague while 'twas going about? 'Twould be quick, and 'twould save a sight of trouble. And so on, and so on. And the maids in the kitchen

trembled and bit their tongues ; and had they been French they would have described Dame Tellam in those hours as *difficile*, but, being Landecarrook, they only tightened their lips and did not fuss to find a word.

Up at the Parsonage, in the parson's room, Miss Ursula sat on the window-seat, with Agrimony for company, and looked out into the gloom, waiting for time to pass and all the while dreading its passing, for the parson had come striding back to them between his errands of mercy, and had spoken through the window the dire tidings from the village, and life had turned appalling in their sight.

"Humphrey, too!" cried Miss Ursula in her heart.

"'Zekiel raving again!" thought Agrimony, chafing.

"Poor old Daniel!" they murmured aloud.

And now and again came 'Lizabeth to look at them and add some dark forebodings ; but she did not loiter long with them, for there was work to be done as long as any one was left alive, and she found neither mistress nor maid pleasantly sociable. Miss Ursula was silent and sad, Agrimony was silent also, but she found room for wrath in her sorrow. 'Zekiel at any rate, was not ill of the plague ; and her thoughts beat about the foreign maid, and she chafed.

A little further down the hill Peter Ludgven was

turning in at the churchyard gate, and he carried a spade on his shoulder. It was not coastguard's work he had come to do among the graves, but hands were becoming scarce in Landecarroch.

Down by the boat-sheds Sam'le Laskey kept vigil on the pebbly beach outside the cottage door. Inside his home there was no need for watching now.

As the day drew on towards night a change passed over the land. The mist, which for weeks had hung low down on everything, was lifted at last, as if a kind hand in Heaven had raised a heavy, white curtain. And up in the sky a pale, great moon-face looked out, pranked by brilliant stars in multitudes, seeming as if they had now remembered, and turned, in mercy, to shine upon the distressful village below.

Along the garden path leading to Peter Ludgven's white cottage, a slight figure crept slowly and without noise between the bush shadows, and when it reached the cottage door it raised the latch cautiously, and still crept on into the dim kitchen. Here the shadows were deep and moved gruesomely, for the room was lighted only by the peats upon the hearth.

Over there, before the blaze, a woman was sitting on a low chair, quite still, quite silent, bending forward, and her back was turned to the door. The creeping figure halted and stood uncertain, waiting again for



Fate to take the initiative. In the morning she had been forced out from this home—cursed; now, in the evening, she had come back to it, silently defiant. But the home had become strange, altered; the silence and the shadows were awesome. The bent figure over by the hearth, so utterly still, made her shiver; the quiet began to grow terrible.

“Teresa! Teresa!”

She remembered that cry; that was not changed. It rang out shrilly now from the room overhead, quickening the blood in her veins, and with stealthy feet she moved to the stairway and crept softly up towards the voice.

She stopped again in the doorway of the bedroom and looked in. The room was bright with the flare of loose-wicked tallow candles, and 'Zekiel had raised himself in the bed, and was pointing with his right arm to a chest standing in the corner by the window, issuing commands. Old Ann Vitty, moving to and fro, obeyed them all, by way of humouring him. Ann Vitty's eyes, as she turned towards the light, seemed over-washed with weeping, but Charity was in her grave, Betty was laid out white and tidy for burial, and surely it was as well to come and help a neighbour as to sit and moan, with folded hands, and

picture the home-coming of the sailor-husband and father.

"The blue scarf," said 'Zekiel impatiently. "I couldn' wrap a black thing about my throat; 'twould scare the maid."

"No, no, dear heart and soul!" murmured Ann Vitty, folding the black scarf obediently, and drawing out the blue; to add to the pile of garments on the chair.

"Teresa!"

He fell back again on his pillows, throwing his arms high, and wringing his hands wildly.

"Teresa! Teresa!"

"Hush 'ee, hush 'ee, dear heart!" cooed Ann Vitty, treading forward to smooth his rigid arm and comfort him. But her hand was pushed aside, and with a quavering cry she looked across the bed and into the very eyes of the foreign maid.

"'Zekiel—Teresa—here—near—close!" The girl laid her hand upon his cheek and the touch was a caress. "Ah, 'Zekiel!"

At her touch and the sound of her voice his arms dropped, and he raised his head listening.

"She's callin', callin' to me!" he whispered hoarsely.

Teresa laid a hand on either cheek and turned his face to hers, and his eyes were straining, but they

looked through her, and beyond her, and did not see her there so close.

"'Zekiel!" she called softly. And he sprang up, mad with the sound of it.

"Let the boy 'bide in peace," cried Ann Vitty sternly. "You've a-worked 'en mischief enough. Go from 'en, I tell 'ee, an' leave 'en to die in peace, you heathen witch—you!"

But Teresa smiled in her face, and fondled 'Zekiel's clenching hands.

"'Zekiel!" she called again, pleased with her power. And 'Zekiel flung out his arms, his voice caught in his throat, and he gasped and panted for his breath.

"Go from my sight!" commanded Ann Vitty, "or I'll beat 'ee down them there stairs." She came round the bed and gripped her bony fingers on the girl's arms. "Go," she commanded again, "or I'll beat 'ee down as you stan'!" And though the girl might not know the words, the raised fist looked strong and ugly, and she shrugged her shoulders and yielded.

"'Zekiel, dear one!" she called back softly.

"She's callin' to me," he whispered, raising his hand for silence. "I'm comin', comin', sweetheart!" Then he turned his face to the doorway where she stood, and his eyes seemed to see her far away, and she looked back and beckoned to him, smiling; but

Ann Vitty's strength was painful, and Teresa turned from the light and stumbled down the dark stairway again to the kitchen.

At the sound of the footsteps, the figure by the hearth raised its head and faced the girl. It was Mary Ludgven. A branch of dried gorse falling forward on the peats flamed up, and the light showed her face to be awful.

"You!" she said slowly, and her voice sounded dead. "Come fore'."

And Teresa stepped over to her, for the voice was compelling.

"Come fore' an' look at my baby," repeated Mary. And Teresa looked down upon her lap and saw the child stretched there.

"I beat 'en to-day," went on the mother, and through her dull tones there ran an awful note. "I beat 'en. The feel of his little arm, warm, is under my hand all the time, as 'twas then. I beat 'en, an' he stretched fore' his hands to me, his eyes was all swimmin' with his baby tears, an' I beat 'en back, I beat 'en back every time. An' through his great tears, an' with his lips all drawn down tremblin', he looked to me, sobbin' an' wonderin' to be served so. An' I beat 'en every time; the feel is under my hand, the marks is on his arms. He's stopped his sobbin', but he's shut his eyes. I tried to coax 'en, but he wouldn' laugh back to me,

he shut his eyes. Make 'em laugh back to me, Teresa ; they all does as you wishes 'em."

And Teresa, with a boastful laugh, leaned down and caught roughly at the bruised little arm to wake the child. But at the touch of his flesh the laugh shuddered into a ghastly shriek, and the arm dropped heavily upon Mary's knee.

"He—is—ice!" she cried. "Cold! Dead!" And she sprang back towards the door.

"Dead!" Mary rose to her feet and turned to the girl, holding one bruised little arm close to her breast. "But—I beat 'em——" she cried slowly. "Won't he never—laugh back to me—no more?"

But the frozen agony on her face was terrible, and Teresa, in wild fear, ran from the sight of it, out into the night, rather than answer that question.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

SHE sped back along the garden path between the bush shadows, and out through the gate, then down the hill, and on across the rough road by Ann Vitty's fuchsia bush; and as she ran she shut her eyes, for the sight of Mary Ludgven's ghastly face danced before her, and it was a sight to be shut out. Pressed lids, however, could not accomplish it, for horror had painted the picture on her eyes, and in her ears one word was ringing, clanging and persistent as a meeting-house bell, "Comin'! Comin'!" and it whipped her fear and drove her on. Then she felt the rising road beneath her feet, and she opened her eyes again and saw the cliff hill before her, and she hurried on without a pause, up the steep side of it, to the turfy level at the top. Then, swerving, down again over the face of it, clutching at the tufted sea-pinks as she stumbled down the path, re-treading every foot of the way over which

she had first come, on that storm-washed September morning, from the sea to Mary Ludgven's home.

On Averack beach she stopped, for the sea fronted her and barred her way—on Averack beach, where 'Zekiel had come to her, and, bending down, had taken her into his arms and into his life. She stood and faced the waves, and the sea-pinks she had clutched from the edge of the path were still in her hands. She looked down on them, and in the white moonshine they were pale and dead-looking. Pale and dead!—that was as the baby would be, back in the cottage. So cold he was, too! Drops of ice-water seemed still to be dripping from the fingers which had clutched the dead little arm. With a shiver she flung the flowers out upon the waves, and tried to fling the recollection with them.

Some ghastly spell seemed to be upon the land, upon the night, upon her own eyes, ears, brain. Averack beach was backed by steep cliffs, and fronted by the sea, but as Teresa stood there, gripping and loosening her small brown hands, and looking out across the silver way, it was as if a magic finger had put back her life-clock, as if she were still standing upon the Spanish plain, haunted, forsaken. She bore the horror of it all for a while, and then she tossed her head and laughed aloud. There, it had been an unshapely tent

that stood behind her, no towering cliff or white-washed cottage; there it had been mile after mile of dry, parched land, stretching before her, not a wet, heaving sea. But the spell of the night weighed down upon her again; the horror was not to be tossed off with a jerk of the head. There were miles, too, of that wet, heaving sea stretching before her, and the moon was shining on it as it had shone on the plain. And in the white-washed cottage there was death, as there had been in the tent. She knew it, and she shuddered, and everything seemed awful—nothing impossible. And the night passed on, and she stood there rigid, except for the ceaseless clasping and unclasping of her hands, and her eyes saw terrible sights on the moon-touched water, and always in her ears was ringing the one word, "Comin'! Comin'!" breaking towards her with each wave.

At length, and suddenly, there rang out a sharper call, "Comin'!" and Teresa turned towards it. A boat was coming in over the silver sea; she could see it clearly, and a man was at the oars. Then with the fear of that other night so strong on her, a band of terror wound itself about her heart, gripping it tight, and each breath brought a groan. And she watched the man draw nearer and nearer, and her eyes were wide and strained. Then at last she saw the boat



rise on the breakers, and heard it grind upon the shingle, and then, as she looked, the band about her heart snapped with a stinging tang of joy, and she closed her lids for a moment to ease their aching. And the man leaped out and hurried towards her.

It was 'Zekiel—'Zekiel Myners! They had told her he was ill, near to death, and he was here by her side, laughing, bare-headed! She had never heard him laugh in that way before—and, oh! it was a good thing to be merry—merry, on such a night!

"I've come to 'ee, sweetheart! I heard 'ee callin' of me, an' I've come."

His voice was soft, but joyous as a bird's, and his hands caught hers and laid them tightly upon his breast. He was wearing the clothes which Ann Vitty had laid out for him, and the blue scarf was knotted loosely about his throat. Handsome his face was, too, though it was white as death.

"'Zekiel!" she cried, her voice trembling as a little child's all glad and eager. "Ah, 'Zekiel, I am—happy! I was desolate."

He lifted her face to the full light of the moon, and looked down upon it, smiling.

"Come!" he said, and there was a grand power in his voice. "Come, darlin'!"

With a strong arm he drew her forward to the boat

lying at the water's edge, and without a word she did his bidding, and, stepping in, went to the stern, and sat there watching him.

'Zekiel had come to her again on Averack beach—had come when all things were ugly and terrible, and he was strong and light-hearted—to-night. Master Humphrey—he had become grim and stern, and—ah, so still and horrible! 'Zekiel was better—at least, to-night. She laughed softly to herself as she watched him push off the boat and then leap into it as it swung free from the beach. And then as he faced her and slid out his oars she smiled back at him; and so, each looking joyously into the other's moonlit face, they glided outward under the stars.

Beyond the little breakers the sea was smooth as a pool, and 'Zekiel pulled a slow, rhythmic stroke along the trembling, silver way which seemed to lead to Heaven. Circles of light quivered about the oars as they dipped out of sight, and showers of light dripped off them as they rose again. And for a long while no word was spoken as the boat passed out, away from the shore, into the absolute silence of the wonderful night. And the soft air was as a warm breath upon the bare neck of the girl, and did not stir so much as a curl upon the man's uncovered head.

At length 'Zekiel stopped—the oars, poised above the water, dripped only single drops of light back into it—and bending towards the girl he whispered with an awesome gladness: “We'm nearin' Heaven!”

For answer she spread her little hands to him, as if her heaven were there.

Then he shipped oars, and, leaning over, drew her to him, and for the second time he held her clasped tightly in his arms, her soft cheek upon his happy heart. And in all the world there seemed no pain, no sin, no sorrow, no sound even, but the slow lap of the water against the boat, which heaved gently, as if it, too, were a soft cheek pressed against a happy heart. And the glorious sky above was radiant, the stars peered down, and some were trembling as if with sympathy, and the moon looked full upon the man and maid, for her pale glow was no intrusion, and once or twice a fleck of light dropped and trailed down athwart the sky, as if a happy tear had fallen from the gentle eye.

And in the boat 'Zekiel at length raised the dark face to his. “Darlin'!” he cried triumphantly, and he pressed his lips on hers.

And so he held her—her cheek to his—her heart to his heart—and the pain, the torment, the madness, all forgotten, wiped from his mind.

And time passed on. The night moved nearer to the dawning. The boat heaved gently upon the sea's slow-throbbing heart, and the silence of a dead world lay upon the face of the waters.

The quick, mournful cry of a sea-bird, lonely and benighted, struck their ears at last, and 'Zekiel raised his face to the sky, and so he held it, alert, as if waiting for more sound. Then he loosed his arms from the girl. "Comin'!" he whispered, and he passed one hand across his eyes. His other hand falling, struck upon an oar, and by instinct he gripped it and settled it in the rowlock, then turned and slid the other blade out on the wet shine of the sea. And Teresa crouched back in the stern, and watched the blades grip the water, then rise and dip again.

Still no word was spoken, and the boat turned and pointed her bow shorewards, and glided back over the trembling light again. A heavy foreboding began to creep about Teresa's heart and press upon it. The rise and fall of the oars held her eyes, and she grew to dread each stroke that was pulled; but she could not find courage to break through the silence and stop them by a command. She could not find strength to put out her hands and grip them to stillness; she knew that she was being taken back to the land where there was death. She knew that she hated it, and was

afraid, but she knew that the going back was inevitable.

'Zekiel's eyes were turned from her; he was looking out to the horizon, as if waiting for something which lay beyond.

When the boat grated upon Averack beach again, 'Zekiel stepped quickly out and strode away towards the cliff path. He threw no glance back as he went. It seemed that he had forgotten the girl, and she, in her wonder, looked at him and let him go.

But to-night her brain was full of tricks and fancies. Averack beach held horrors; unreasonable, impossible, ghastly things were lurking on every side of her, and when her lover had reached the cliff and had begun to climb the path, she sprang from the boat, terrified, and sped after him across the shingle.

"'Zekiel!" she panted as she neared him. "Stop! Is it—that I—am nothing—to you?"

He turned at the sound of her voice and looked towards the sea, smiling.

"'Zekiel! 'Zekiel!" she cried. "I am here—I, Teresa—close!"

She laid a hand upon his arm, and he caught at it fiercely and gladly.

"Teresa!" he whispered, "sweetheart!"

His grip was rough, and she stumbled and fell

forward, clenching and tearing at a tuft of sea-pinks growing by the path edge. But he caught her quickly to him again.

"Don't 'ee go from me, darin': don't 'ee draw back from me," he said cooingly. And then he flung his arms about her, and bent to her lips, and kissed them passionately again and again.

For a while he stood there on the steep path, swaying, and with a rapturous smile on his white face. Then he lifted his head high, as if listening, and his arms slackened and drew away from Teresa until he was holding only her hands.

"Hush!" he whispered, and his hands slowly slid from hers as he waned. Then, "Comin': comin'!" he shouted out upon the night, and he turned from her and hurried up the cliff. And the sea-pinks she had clutched in falling were left in his rightening hold.

Teresa stood there, with her hands loose and nerveless at her sides, and she wondered. But, as the sound of the stumbling footsteps grew fainter, some of the strength which the night had stolen came back to her, and she gripped her hands again and followed.

As the grey dawn came creeping up the sky, stealing the brightness from the stars, up at the Parsonage a side door was opened slowly, and Agimony stepped

out into the chilly air. She had been sitting on the edge of her bed so many hours, waiting. Surely now that the day had broken through the night she might stir about and learn whether or not her fellow-creatures were living or dead. Right or wrong, she had made up her mind, and, closing the door cautiously behind her, she left the garden and hurried down the hill. If the parson scolded her for her deed she could bear it. In her own sight the errand appeared to be one of mere humanity.

Upstairs, in Peter Ludgven's cottage, the dawn was creeping in at the side of the window curtains in 'Zekiel's room, taking all the radiance from the lamp-flame, turning it garish and impotent. Ann Vitty had dropped asleep in the hard, straight-backed chair by the bed; her head had fallen forward on her breast; her big-jointed, toil-worn hands lay slack upon her lap, and her old eyes, weary with the sight of pain and the wash of tears, were resting at last. She had watched so long. With one thread of consciousness she believed that she was watching still. But her thoughts had glided from the real pains to the dream pains, and she slept.

In the kitchen below, the dawn crept in unhindered, for the curtains had been undrawn all night, and here there was no lamp flame to resist it. Even the peats

on the hearth were burnt out, and white, and cold. On the low chair before the ashes Mary was still sitting, crouched over the baby which lay upon her lap, and she, too, had fallen asleep.

Some miles away, Peter Ludgven, with a set face and a heavy heart, walked along the cliffs with his eyes turned seawards—for this was his duty. But here, in Landecarrook, stillness and silence were on his home, sleep and death filled it; and some careless hand had left the cottage door open, and sleep and death seemed to steal out into the chilly garden and lie there, too.

Two figures were standing at the garden gate—Teresa and Agrimony—and their eyes travelled from the open doorway to the curtained window above it, but they did not venture nearer. The silence which hung over the house seemed to bar the open doorway, and they waited.

Upstairs in the cottage, Ann Vitty's head jerked forward; she stirred, and unconsciously drew her fingers into working curves again. Then, with a start, she awoke, feeling guilty and amazed.

"I must ha' dozed a minute," she muttered, and she turned her sleep-heavy eyes to the bed. Everything was still. "If he'd a-been ravin' I couldn' ha' closed my eyes," she decided. "He must ha' been sleepin'



sound." And she rose from her chair to bend over the patient.

He lay on his back, with his face turned to the ceiling; his hands, which were lying outside the coverlet, were clenched, but his lips were laughing. Ann Vitty leaned closer, and looked long at him, and her brain wakened and her eyes widened. A greyness spread over her wrinkled face which the lamp-light could not hide with its garish shine, and after a minute she trod hurriedly across to the window and drew back the curtain. Then she came back to the bed and leaned over it again, laying her hand against the upturned cheek, and then she shrieked aloud: "He's dead! He's dead! 'Zekiel Myners is dead!"

The girls, watching in the garden below, saw the curtain drawn back, and heard the shriek clap out on the silence. And Agrimony caught Teresa's arm as she sprang forward, and flung her back. "You dare!" she cried in her pain. And Teresa stood aside, undetermined, while Agrimony rushed along the garden path and in at the open door.

"He's dead! He's dead!" cried Ann Vitty, as Agrimony came up the stairs. "Come fore' an' look to 'en; I couldn' ha' dozed more'n a minute or so. I couldn'—I couldn'. An' I woke to find 'en cold an' dead!"

Agrimony hurried to the bed and looked at the white face, but quick, great tears blinded her eyes and splashed down upon the sheet.

"Zekiel's dead!" she sobbed. "Dead an' gone! Oh, Ann Vitty, is he gone for ever? Can't we do nothin'?" She wrung her hands. "Let's do somethin'," she pleaded. "Let's bring 'en back. Tell me, Ann, tell me what to do!"

Ann Vitty shook her head. "He's gone, sure enough," she said, and she drew her apron across her eyes. But Agrimony turned in desperation and hurried down the stairs again.

"Mary Ludgven," she cried to the sleeping woman before the hearth, "Zekiel's dead!"

Mary raised her head slowly and stared at her with dazed eyes.

"Zekiel's dead!" Agrimony sobbed again. "Come up an' do somethin'."

But Mary only shivered; she did not rise. "Dead!" she said slowly, "they'm all dead. Won't he never laugh back to me again?"

"Laugh!" cried Agrimony, in sudden anger, "he's dead!—he's dead!" And wild with the ache of inaction she ran out at the open door again and along the garden path. "You've killed 'en," she cried, seizing Teresa's arms roughly. "You've killed 'en dead!"

you heathen brute beast! You've killed 'Zekiel—dead!"

"Killed! Dead!" repeated Teresa, wondering.

"Yes; killed!—dead!—and you've a-done it!"

For answer Teresa threw up her head and laughed, and Agrimony stiffened with anger. She clenched her fist to strike, but Teresa drew back and spoke. "Zekiel—not—dead," she declared, picking her words. "We have sailed—'Zekiel and me—in a ship on the sea—this night," she looked up and waved her hand to the sky, "with the moon."

Agrimony gasped. "'Zekiel an' you," she repeated. "You lie! 'Zekiel's been ravin'; most of yesterday he was ravin'—dyin'!"

But Teresa laughed again. "He was there," she declared, pointing seawards. "'Zekiel—and me. He took my hands. I was his beloved! Ah!—but an hour—a minute—what you call—since we were there!"

For a moment Agrimony stared and panted in wonder, then tales she had heard flashed back through her brain, and springing at Teresa, she shrieked aloud in horror: "You'm a witch!" she cried. "You'm a witch, sure enough! An' you've stole his soul so well as killed his body!"

Something had turned Teresa to a coward. It was not the rage in the eyes fronting her, nor the death

lying the other side of that open door, nor the chill of the dawn. There was some strange power—some undefined, awful strength—closing round about her, numbing her courage; she felt the grip of it, and all these other things became ghastly and terrible. She quailed now before Agrimony's eyes; she was afraid of her—of everything—and she turned and ran swiftly down the hill.

But Agrimony was swift, too, and desperate. It seemed as if quick action must ease the great hopelessness in her heart; and at the corner leading down the village street she clutched at Teresa's skirt and brought her to the ground.

"If you've stolen 'en, give 'en back!" she cried, "an' I won't ask nothin' more of 'ee." Then her voice turned to fierce pleading. "Give 'en back, maid! Give 'en back, co'!"

But Teresa had grown scared and trembling. "'Zekiel—he is not dead," she persisted. "'Zekiel, he talk—sail—with me—but now—so small time gone."

From a cottage near by sounded the click of a window hasp, then a casement was opened, and a head leaned out.

"Who's it? What's amiss?" called a voice, as the eyes belonging to it caught sight of the two girls.

"'Zekiel Myners is dead," cried Agrimony, "an'——"

But then her grief caught her voice, and the head was drawn back; and Agrimony turned to Teresa, hating her.

Within a few moments the cottage door opened and a man stepped out.

"What's the maid done?" he asked.

"She's a witch!" cried Agrimony. "She says as 'Zekiel isn' dead; as how he's been a-sailin' an' a-talkin' with her; an' I know as how all last night he was dyin'. Parson Swayn said the very words, an' Ann Vitty's been sittin' by 'en all through, an' I've seen 'en with my own eyes—dead!"

"'Zekiel—he is not dead!" repeated Teresa, shrinking.

The man looked from one maid to the other, and ran his fingers through his hair. And then all down the village street casements were thrown back, one after another, and heads were hung out to know the reason of the sharp words upon the stillness of the dawn. And Agrimony cried out to them: "Here's a witch—a heathen witch!—what's been sailin' on the sea with 'Zekiel Myners' sperrit, an' he lyin' dead 'pon his bed the while."

And the heads were drawn back; and in a marvellous time out from the houses of mourning and houses of death stepped figures scantily dressed, men and women with haggard faces and sunken eyes, who closed round

about the two maids and listened to Agrimony's tale of evil-doing.

Teresa, still crouching on the ground, glinted from face to face, her own cheeks drained to a curious grey pallor, her black hair falling in a frame on either side of them, her eyes wide and frightened.

And the villagers glared at her as they listened. Trouble and pain had killed their fear of her and now stirred them only to rage.

"From the day she come'd," declared a wife, whose cottage behind her stood emptied of husband and children, "from the day she come'd she've brought nort but trubble 'pon trubble."

"She've ill-wished us plain enough," said a man with a pitiless face. "Look to the catches! Look to the weather——"

"An' the fire!" burst in another voice.

"An' 'Zekiel Myners! An' the plague!" wailed a white-faced woman with her hand against her heart. "An'——"

But Teresa had glanced beyond them down the steep street, and there, advancing upon her, she saw what seemed to her eyes an army of vengeance—men and women with stern lips and pitiless eyes—and, heading the line, with silly curses rolling off his tongue, came Sam'le Laskey.

With a shriek of terror she sprang to her feet, and, wrenching herself from Agrimony's hold, darted away from them along the old road by the fuchsia bush towards the steep cliff hill.

The sight of her flying from them maddened the villagers. The recollection of the pains they had borne chafed in their brains; their veins ran fire; ghastly sounds of rage and anguish broke from them; and with one unspoken consent, they moved forward and followed after her. And in the midst of them, hooting, and threatening, and howling vengeance, ran Sam'le Laskey, and in his gripped hands were pebbles from Landecarrock beach.

The grey of the dawn was passing; the light spreading over the land showed a dull, sunless day; and once more the mist seemed to be gathering over the sea; and the girl sped on up the hill before her pursuers.

At the summit she turned, and the foremost among them could see her grey, drawn face and hunted eyes, as she realised their merciless hatred of her and their relentlessness. For one moment she stood there, swaying, and spread her arms to them in abject terror, then she turned with a cry of despair towards the cliff's face and fled down the narrow path.

As she went out of their sight they halted, then they

swerved from the road and hurried over to the edge of the cliff; only one of the number followed after her down the path, and that one was Sam'le Laskey.

As those at the top leaned forward to watch the hurrying figure, there came a sharp cry from the foremost line of them. It was Agrimony's cry, and she was pointing to the beach below.

"Look! Look!" Her words now were hoarse whispers. "'Tis 'Zekiel's boat! There—there on the sand!"

The men and women strained their eyes to see.

"'Tis 'Zekiel's boat!" they gasped.

"'Zekiel's, sure enough," said one man slowly, "an' who'sever brought 'en round Landecarroch point, 'Zekiel hisself must have took 'en from the shed, for he alwise kept his own key."

"There's been devilment abroad this night, eff never afore," declared another solemnly.

And Agrimony buried her face in her hands and sobbed.

"Look to her now!" cried a boy, who had thrown himself flat on the turf and was peering over the edge. "That's never no human creature, no common maid. 'Tis witch-work what she's a-doin', if ever there was such."

Teresa had reached the beach, had floundered across



the loose shingle, and had reached the boat where it lay, now some way up from the water. The boat was heavy, but the strength of terror lay in the girl's arms, and in a frenzy of haste she clutched the bow-end, and, bending her shoulders to the work, forced it some way down over the beach.

"A slip of a maid to shift that lumberin' boat," cried the boy, incredulous, with his hand outstretched. But with jerk after jerk the girl forced it along, and Sam'le Laskey stood by and pelted her the while.

"Ah! God A'mighty!"

The cry broke from a large, half-dressed woman, who, in the excitement of the scene, had edged farther and farther along the cliff. Now she came running back to the crowd with shaking limbs and her finger pointed seawards, and all eyes left the "witch-work" on the beach below and followed the direction of her hand.

No one spoke as they all looked and saw what the woman had seen. Some of the men drew a hissing breath back over their teeth, and some of the women pressed their hands to their throats as if to loosen the words which, if spoken, might relieve them; the boy on the turf, too, rose to his knees; but no eyes were shifted when once they had fallen on the sight.

There, to the right of them, from the horizon line, as if gliding out from the sky, came a large, dark ship, square-rigged, with high, black bows, running swiftly through the still air as if driven on by a favouring wind. The mist which had been gathering over the sea lifted itself, and the ship showed out with a marvellous distinctness. Masts, sails, cordage, black as pitch against the dull whiteness of the sea and sky, seemed to press upon the eyes that watched, as she drove on towards Averack Cove. Then, as she came nearer, figures could be seen moving about her deck and handling her ropes; and some of the women on the cliff shrieked as they clapped eyes on them, but still they looked; and the men on the cliff stared too, with strained eyes set in bloodless faces, but they said never a word.

A howl of rage from the beach below cut through the air, and the men and women caught their breath and sighed, as if waking from a dream, and looking down they saw Sam'le Laskey standing at the water's edge, with his right arm raised to hurl. But the boat—'Zekiel's boat—was heaving free on the waves, and the girl was at the oars, pulling with a wild, waving stroke, which set the boat lurching dangerously. And the bow was turning seawards, pointing towards the black vessel.

The crowd on the cliff was trembling and dumb, turning its eyes from boat to ship, from ship to boat. It was as if a drama had been staged upon the waters to be played out before them. The witch-maid in her rolling boat, and the ghastly crew on the deck of the black vessel, seemed to belong to one scene, brought together to play their parts, and as the minutes passed the space between them grew narrower.

Suddenly, as their eyes fell back upon the deck, the villagers saw that a new figure was standing there—no small, white-faced horror, such as those who steered the evil ship, but a huge man, with a swarthy, alert face, wearing a picturesque suit, which, even at a distance, could be seen to be of rich texture, and round about his waist was bound a bright, fringed sash. As they watched, they saw him step forward from the crew and stand at the bows, with his eyes fixed upon the unsteady boat as it drew nearer and nearer.

"The devil an' his crew!" murmured one of the men, in a hard, expressionless voice.

"Hush!" whispered the kneeling boy. "See!"

As the dark man took his stand at the bows and looked upon the boat, the girl, with her back turned to him, stopped rowing suddenly, her hands dropped to her sides, the oar blades, drifting, jerked in the rowlocks, and the mist which had lifted for a while began

to creep down again. Spreading her hands slowly, as if half-blind, she rose from the seat, and turning faced the ship.

The crowd, watching, gripped its hands, and closed its teeth hard behind pressed lips, for the drama before them began to savour of tragedy.

For one long moment the girl in the boat raised her face to the man at the bows, and she swayed as she stood.

The crowd on the cliff strained its eyes, for the denseness was increasing; the mist was lowering, thickening, spreading over every thing, and their strained eyes could note the masts, the sails, the cordage fading before them. A grey film hung about the high, black sides, about 'Zekiel's boat, about the swaying girl, and the rigid man. Then, through it, they saw the man lean forward and fling out his arm, and the gesture held terrible meaning. Turning to the girl they saw her sway back as if the out-flung arm had struck at her heart, then she sprang quickly to the edge of the rocking boat, and for an instant her face, just a blotch of pallor through the mist, was turned towards Averack beach, then they saw her fling up her arms and sway forward over the sea.

The thick mist lay close down upon the waters, as a

grey wall, fronting the faces on the cliff. The men and women, with their eyes straining against it and their ears alert, fancied that the sound of a splash hissed back to them, but it might have been a wave breaking upon the beach below; they fancied that a faint cry shuddered up to them, but it might have been the wail of a distant sea-bird.

For many minutes they stood in absolute stillness and silence, waiting. But the mist wall fronting them was impenetrable. The black ship and the boat, the threatening man and the witch-maid—all the horror and the evil, were shut from them.

A woman's sob broke the silence at last, and Agri-mony threw herself upon the turf, face downward, and hid her eyes. But again the hush and the stillness closed over them, and they waited. Only Sam'le Laskey on the beach below stood at the water's edge, hurling pebbles into the mist.

. . . . .

Back in Peter Ludgven's cottage, the doctor, on his rounds, climbed the stairs to 'Zekiel Myners' room; and when he reached it he leaned long over the bed as he listened to Ann Vitty's moanings. At length he straightened his back again, and spending no time on comfort or blame, stepped to the wall and unhung a

small mirror from a nail, then he bent over the bed again, and held the mirror to the man's white lips. Then silence fell ; Ann Vitty found that all her words had been said, and she threw her apron over her head and wept quietly.

The stillness lasted so long that Ann Vitty, knowing the doctor to be a man of many duties, at length drew her apron down again and looked, then she, too, leaned over the bed and watched.

Outside, the dense mist, which had lowered and darkened the room, was melting away slowly, and the sun shone through. One bright beam striking in at the window, fell athwart the bed, and the doctor drew the mirror quickly from over 'Zekiel's lips, and held it in the golden shine, and the surface of the mirror was dim.

"He isn't dead—yet," remarked the little man concisely. Then he lifted one clenched hand from the coverlet and turned it over in his own, and then he straightened the rigid fingers, and, with a puzzled look on his face, took a few crushed sea-pinks from their hold. Then he laid the hand back again, and turning, saw another battered flower on the floor.

At Averack Cove, the men and women watching saw the mist roll back at last, and the sun, struggling through,

brightened the dull sea and set it glittering. But of the scene which the denseness had shut from them, there was only one trace left on the waste of waters—'Zekiel's boat, heaving with the rise and fall of the waves—empty!

## CHAPTER XIX.

**T**HAT year, in Landecarrook, Spring ran swiftly forward and, with a gush of warm tears for the sorrow she had brought, died in Summer's tender holding; but Summer, when her turn came to die, was loth to go, and lingered, looking back with love in her eyes, then forward with a flush of fear upon her cheeks, till Autumn, law-abiding even in his sympathy, went back to fetch her, but, meeting her, held her in his arms, and would not hasten her. And the September day might have been June, as Peter Ludgven dug his spade into the earth by his garden gate, to loosen a bindweed root which had sent up an arm to clutch a trailing woodbine branch; and Mary stood at her door, and watched him with far-away, sorrow-steeped eyes, the hard look still on her face which had lain there now for months, and her hands loosely clasped before her.

Up the hill, towards the cottage, two figures were



making their way slowly. And one was tall and angular, with a long-skirted grey coat, which fluttered out now and then as the warm breeze caught it; the other figure was shorter and more rounded, and wore a loosely-tied, hooded cloak of pale blue cotton.

"And to this day—it is a curious fact—the northern side of a churchyard will be deserted, while that which lies south——"

The parson's voice rose and fell in a gentle murmur as he took his slow strides, and grasped his small hammer in one hand, and his little tin box in the other; while Miss Ursula's pretty face looked up at him from its pale blue frame, as she imbibed the antiquarian's lore with a sweet seriousness.

"And the custom of digging the graves from east to west——" The parson, raising his head, caught sight of Peter at the gate. "Ah, Ludgven!" he said, "good-day to you."

"Mornin', passon."

"Gardening, I see."

"Yessir; a bit of weedin'."

"Ah!—yes; the *calystegia sepium*, or bindweed; order, *convolvulaceae*—a troublesome plant, indeed, and most persistent. The present victim? I see; I see. *Lonicera Periclymenum*, or honeysuckle—*Caprifoliaceae* tribe."

"Yessir," agreed Peter politely.

"A glorious day!" remarked the parson as he moved on his way. "My grand-daughter and I purpose climbing the hill to the cairn, by the right-hand side of the barrow. I still feel much doubt as to its origin. Perhaps a closer examination may throw some more decided light upon the matter. Ah, those Druids!—those Druids! What trouble and confusion have they not wrought for honest antiquarians! Good-day, Ludgven—good-day."

"Good-day, passon."

"Ah, Mary! good-day to you," he added, as his eyes travelled along the path and saw her at the door. "I had not perceived you."

"Good-day, sir," answered Mary dully.

"We want," he called back, with a kindly smile, "to see some of Peter's roses growing in your cheeks again."

When he had passed on up the hill Peter turned and looked at his wife, and her white face seemed to strike a fresh bruise on his heart. He sighed as he leaned to grasp his spade again; then he suddenly determined something, and, leaving the spade at a slant in the ground, he walked down the path to the doorway.

"Mary," he said in a low voice, which was shaking, too, "you heard what passon did say?"

She looked at him without interest.

"I heard—I s'pose," she answered slowly.

"Can't 'ee—cheer up, dear heart?"

"I'm right enough."

He felt sick with the hopelessness of things. It was so baffling—this new, cold nature of hers. Then, to Peter, who had sorrowed so long over the small grave in the churchyard, and still more over this living, daily grief, it suddenly seemed that he could not go on bearing it, as if he must take some action and do something to break it away. He caught her arm, and his voice shook with passion and appealing.

"Mary," he cried, "don't 'ee take on so! Be as you was before he died; cry your heart out over the trouble an' let me comfort 'ee. Co' Mary; don't 'ee stan' so still and quiet. Ain't I nothin' to 'ee no longer?"

"You'm hungry, p'r'aps," she said, starting half-pettishly. "Come 'long in an' I'll set dinner." A dull ache had shot through her heart where everything had been blank and numb for months, and the stirring of the pain frightened her; she dreaded that the heart in her should wake. But Peter had no mercy now.

"Mary!" he demanded, pain sounding through his cry, "tell me, ain't I nothin' to 'ee? Didn' I love 'en, too? But ain't you more to me than any son—ain't I more to you?"

She did not speak or throw off his hand, but she shivered under it as if struck by an ague, and her eyes were frightened. She turned, and his hand fell from her arm as she walked into the cottage, and something like a sob tore his throat as he went back to his spade.

As that day wore on the air grew sultry ; the land was as if palpitating under the glare of the sun, and the sea looked brazen. Butterflies pitched upon chosen flowers and stayed there, with their wings spread wide to the heat ; even the bees became loiterers for once in their life of hurry, and still seemed to be setting good examples.

It was evening-time when the parson and Miss Ursula came down the hill again, and Peter's garden was empty as they passed, but a faint, hot breeze had sprung to life, and was languidly lifting the leaves of the bushes, showing what their under-tints were like. Just beyond Ann Vitty's fuchsia bush they overtook Master Humphrey, who turned and looked glad, and all three climbed the cliff hill together.

Master Humphrey was somewhat thinner for the tussle he had had with death, back in the springtime, but his face was well bronzed by summer's sun, and his cheerfulness had come back to him. His eyes held laughs in them as he drew out the woollen neckcloth

which Dame Tellam still thought necessary to his well-being, and which, in mercy towards her fears, he took and wore—in his pocket.

"Whew!" he ejaculated, as he looked from it to the coppery sky.

"You will come with -us, Humphrey?" asked the parson, when they had strolled to the point where the paths branched. "Ursula shall refresh you with a cup of her China tea-drink."

"Yes, Humphrey, for Dame Tellam's sake, let me minister to your fatigue."

"For my own sake the offer seems strong enough," he laughed, and there lay a half-humble tenderness in his eyes and voice. Ursula, looking at him, laughed also; she noted the cheerfulness, but she did not heed the tenderness.

As they neared the churchyard they stood awhile and looked over the low wall. The green tidiness had been sadly scarred since the first day of Master Humphrey's home-coming, and brown mounds, with sun-shrunk sods of turf atop of them, were terribly close and many. Over in a corner, by the big yew tree, under which Daniel Laskey had been used to eat his dinner, a man's figure was bending beside one of these mounds, with his mouth pressed to the scorched turf.

"Sam'le Laskey again!" said Master Humphrey, quietly. "Poor, angry fellow!"

The two men and the girl stood silent for a time, and looking at Sam'le, remembered.

"She was very, very beautiful!" mused Miss Ursula aloud at last. Then silence fell again.

"Flowers that grow out of place are classed as weeds," quoth the parson slowly, but his voice was kindly.

Then they turned away and walked upwards to the Parsonage.

When the tea had been drunk, and Agrimony had carried away the cups, the parson went over to his table, and, taking his afternoon's notes from his pocket, fell deep in comparisons and probabilities. Ursula, rising from the oak chair by her little tea-table, crossed to a window-seat and held her cheeks forward to catch the faint breeze through the open casement. Master Humphrey rose, too, then sat beside her.

For some time they looked out over the garden and the sea to the horizon, and neither spoke.

"'Tis drawing on for a year since I came home to Pensallas," said Master Humphrey at length.

"And I," exclaimed Miss Ursula, in low-voiced delight, "am near to a year older." She lifted her hands and pressed them palm to palm.

Master Humphrey leaned forward and took one of

the upraised little hands in his. "Tell me, Ursula," he asked, "why are you so glad?"

"A—h!" She sighed a long, long sigh, which meant many pleasant things, but held no coquetry, and she let her hand lie in his clasp without a tremor.

But by-and-bye, when their low voices, questioning, answering, questioning, answering, had asked and told of countless matters, and the light had grown quite dim, and the parson at his table slumbered over his researches, she forgot that he was Master Humphrey, the squire—that he was grown-up—that he was he—forgot, in fact, that he was anybody, for the size of him was lost in the dimness, the reality of him was lost in her imagination, and, with her hand holding his as much as his held hers, her confidences drifted on as easily, as artlessly, as if she were but thinking her thoughts aloud; and she told him of the ways of life in that splendid land over the sea, of the stories she had weaved, of the dreams she dreamed, and the pictures she saw, day after day, and month after month, here, in this magic room, where nothing seemed impossible; and her voice rose and fell in dreamy absorption.

"And then, one day, the prince feels in his heart that he can wait no longer; he must leave his palace

and sail the whole world over, if needs be, but he must find the dream-maiden or he will never be happy again. So he orders a ship to be prepared—a most beautiful ship, hung with silken hangings, and decked with beautiful flowers, with ribands flying from the masthead, and scores of tiny lamps glittering like jewels—and he sails away from his wonderful country——”

“And he stands on his deck,” broke in Master Humphrey, “and he scans every city, and hamlet, and cliff, and meadow, as he sails by; and he lands and walks among them all, and seeks, and seeks, and then sails on again, until at length he comes to a wild, rocky land—where the dwellings of the people almost touch the sea, I think—and then some voice in his heart tells him that he is drawing nearer to his dream-maiden——”

“Oh, Humphrey! how did you know?——”

“And as he draws near to the land, he cries to his men, ‘Steer for the high cliff yonder, for she whom I seek dwells there.’”

There was a tremor in Miss Ursula’s little hand now, for the story told by another tongue was most enthralling.

“And there,” went on Master Humphrey, “there, sure enough, he finds her in the old castle on the cliff, waiting for him. And when he draws near she knows



him and he knows her." It is Master Humphrey's voice which trembles a little now. "And he holds his arms to her, and she goes to him, and is folded to his heart, and—and—well, of course, they are happy ever after."

When this tale is told, they sit in silence for a little while looking out into the dark, breathless night, where the sky seems to be pressing down upon the earth, and the earth to be panting under the weight of it.

"She would have wedded no — other man, I suppose—this dream-maiden? No commonplace, week-a-day man would have done?"

"Oh, no, Humphrey; how could she, when she was waiting for the prince?"

"No 'Squire of Pensallas,' for instance, would have had any chance?"

"You see, she would not be his dream-maiden."

"She might have been."

Miss Ursula pondered.

"Of course," she said, illuminated by a sudden thought, "a 'Squire of Pensallas' would be a sort of a prince, too, in his way; and if he dreamed of a maiden, and loved her in the dreams as the prince did, he could sail away to find her—just the same—I suppose."

"I suppose he could," agreed Master Humphrey.

Then Agrimony brought in candles and lighted the hanging lamp, bringing an atmosphere of bustling cheerfulness with her, setting the walls a-glistening, and rousing the parson. Master Humphrey rose from the window-seat.

"Dame Tellam's heart will be palpitating two beats to one if I do not gladden her eyes soon," he laughed. And with a cheerful "good-night," he left the parson's room and went out into the darkness as the first big splashes of thunder-rain were striking the fainting land. Miss Ursula listened to his footsteps dying away in the distance, then she turned her face from the window to the lighted room.

"'Tis making for a storm, I fear," she remarked to the parson, and her little face grew rather anxious. "I trust that Humphrey will escape it."

Outside, with one gust from across the sea, the breeze stiffened to a wind which rushed over the land, leaving the higher air still and oppressive; and the big rain-drops quickened, then fell in a drenching torrent, filling the air with a sharp "swish." Footsteps sounded on Master Humphrey's ears as he bent his head to the storm, and "Good-night, sir," came a voice through the wind and downpour.

"You, Ludgven! Good-night. Rough work for you this time," he called back.

"Ay, sir, 'twill be a wet skin, anyhow."

Then each passed on his way, and a flash of light across the sky showed their bending figures as they battled on. Then a quick crash of thunder boomed and rattled across the sky, and the storm had begun in earnest.

Home in Peter Ludgven's cottage Mary sat by her uncurtained window, with her face turned to the raging night, and as she watched the sky flashing into light, and heard the thunder crashing, as if upon the very rafters over her head, each flash and each peal scorched and beat down the dead wall which had lain round about her heart, and she felt the pain stirring, then throbbing quicker, then pulsing in her with all the pent-up force of the past miserable year.

For some time she sat on, still and quiet, making no sign of the pain she was bearing, but, as it grew keener, the remembrance of that last September night came back to her, and she moaned and pressed her hands together; and then, turning her head, her eyes, with quick instinct, looked down on the spot where the cradle had stood then, close to her foot. The cradle was still and empty in the corner now.

"A—h, my God!" she cried out sharply through set teeth. And she rose and paced quickly to and fro. The emptiness in her heart was maddening her for the time, and the sight of the little grave which rose before her eyes, out in the night and the lash of the storm, turned her sick and desperate with an agony of impotence and desolation. Her longing was goading her; her love was torturing her; her little kitchen was as a hell, its closed door shutting out hope.

In time the sight of that closed door grew unbearable, and she flung it open to the storm, and stood outside it in the wind and the rain, and the flashing and the roaring. And by-and-bye, the cool lash of the drops upon her head seemed to clear the sudden madness from her brain, and by degrees the picture of the small storm-swept grave faded from before her eyes, and straining them through the night, she thought of Peter.

"Peter," she said aloud, and quite calmly, "I want 'ee." But the words were caught from her mouth and tossed high in the hurricane.

She left the door-stone then, and beat her way slowly along the garden path. When she reached the gate she battled back to the doorway, then hesitated, and struggled to the gate again.

When she had strained her eyes down the hill for a while in the flashes of the lightning, she opened the gate and went through, then turned her face downwards and walked till she reached Ann Vitty's corner.

And all through the night she went backwards and forwards in the cut of the wind and the lash of the rain, but each battle forward was longer than the battle back again. And so the hours passed; and towards the dawning the storm was passing also, the thunder was hushed, the downpour was but a gentle rain driving in from the sea, and the wind's passion was dying, sobbing itself away, as a naughty child sobs with smothered face when all the anger has gone by.

As Peter strode back over the cliff, drenched by the rain and ruddy with the gale, he saw a woman hurrying towards him with bare head and a white, smiling face. As she came closer she spread her hands to him, and then he, too, hurried, and catching the outspread hands, held them tightly, and stood amazed.

"Why, Mary—dear heart alive!"

"I've been wantin' of 'ee, Peter," she answered trembling, and then she pressed her face to his wet coat.

So he held her for a minute, and knew it to be truth, and was silent in the amazement and the joy of it. Then he roused her tenderly.

"Come, my dear, come home to the warmth an' the dryth or you'll be gettin' your death of cold; an' how'd that be for me?"

So she raised her head and turned her white face homewards, and with Peter's arm still about her they went slowly down the hill.

Her black gown was soaked; her white apron hung limp from her waist. Her golden hair lay drenched, and blown in loose strands and tendrils about her face and neck; and the 'kerchief about her bare throat was heavy with the rain. But her eyes were happy, and Peter's heart was near to bursting with his resurgent gladness.

. . . . .

It had, indeed, been a furious storm, and Master Humphrey must have felt some of the fury of it as he walked back to Pensallas that night; but to Miss Ursula that seemed no good reason why he should not venture up the Parsonage hill again. The friendship between the Parsonage and Pensallas had been too intimate to need, or allow of, formal visits, but on most days there had been some meeting, chance or otherwise, between the squire and the parson or his

household. Now a week had passed by and Master Humphrey had not come.

The parson, being particularly occupied just then by a doubt as to the date of the north transept of his church, was both absorbed and home-keeping, and Miss Ursula after one remark anent the squire's absence, felt suddenly disinclined to take note of it again.

"If he had fallen sick from the exposure to the rain, tidings would have reached us, for sure," she decided. The decision somewhat relieved her anxiety but left her yet more puzzled, and though she took her way as usual in the village and the country round, she heard no mention of Master Humphrey, nor would she enquire.

Agrimony noted Master Humphrey's absence; she also noted Miss Ursula's pretty face changing, as the days went by, from puzzled anxiety to troubled unrest; but, indeed, there was little that Agrimony did not note with those quick, dark eyes of hers, and for many days when she was away from her small mistress's presence, and alone, she laughed merrily to herself over the matter, for she found such signs amusing. But when a week had passed Agrimony stopped laughing—the amusement had staled somewhat—and, instead, she put on her hat and strolled down into

the village with languid lids and eyes carefully careless of all details of life as she went, seeming as if distant views and Landecarroch as a whole, were the only sights she desired.

There was, indeed, little to be seen that morning but view, and little to be heard, for the village was very quiet and still. As she passed along by Landecarroch beach, however, she saw 'Zekiel Myners down by the boat-sheds, occupied in running out his boat, and she seemed to like the sight, for her eyes grew less careless and more smiling.

"'Zekiel!" she called. "'Zekiel Myners!"

'Zekiel looked up, and he also seemed pleased with circumstance, for his sun-browned face took on a ruddier shade and his eyes brightened.

"Hullo!" he called. "How'm 'ee gettin' along?"

Then Agrimony answered with some sounds which may have been words when they left her tongue, but certainly were not such beyond her lips, and which, at any rate, had the effect of drawing 'Zekiel from his boat to her side to learn their import.

"How quiet-like all the place is this morning," she said.

"Most have gone round the point mackerel fish-in'," he explained. "The very fish take autumn for summer."



"An' you've a-been wavin' good-bye to 'em, I s'pose?"

"No; I'm just about off; my lines hindered me."

"An' which of 'ee's got the squire aboard to-day?"

"Nuther of us. Squire's gone away—went off some days back."

"Aw, yes, to be sure. I wasn' thinkin'."

Agrimony spoke unblushingly, but having gained a fact she moved to go. 'Zekiel stepped forward as she stepped back.

"Won't 'ee—won't 'ee come for a breath of sea?" he pleaded persuasively.

"Law, to think of such a thing! A busy maid like me! An' all among the mackerel, too!" she added.

"I wouldn' so much as catch a single livin' one!" he declared.

"That ain't no hard matter at any time!" she retorted.

"Come, Agrimony," he pleaded again.

She narrowed her lids at the dazzle of the sea as she looked out to it, smiling, but she was shaking her head the while.

"Agrimony," 'Zekiel said softly.

"'Zekiel," she answered half-mimicking, yet softly, too.

"Agrimony, what's fish to me?"

"They'm a brave bit to me," she laughed, stepping

back and shaking her curly head. "I must be hurryin', 'Zekiel Myners; I'll see 'ee again some time."

She went back to the Parsonage with her shred of news, and 'Zekiel went back to his boat and spent the day in doing his duty, but to have neglected it would have been more to his taste.

When Agrimony, amongst other items of interest, casually mentioned Master Humphrey's departing, Miss Ursula heard her with surprise.

"How much unlike Master Humphrey to go without bidding us 'good-bye,'" was all she said, but she thought of the matter quite often, and wondered. And as she wondered a recollection came to her. She had told him that if a "Squire of Pensallas" had dreams of a maid, and loved her in his dreams, he could do as the prince would do, and go to seek her. Perhaps—Master Humphrey——

Miss Ursula pondered. She had found an explanation; it straightened out the puzzle. She had often heard persons say it would be for the best—and yet—Miss Ursula did not like the explanation.

The day grew to a most beautiful evening. Master Humphrey would, like enough, have needed her to "sail to the sunset" with him had he been at home, as he had so often done before. And when tea had been drunk, and Miss Ursula sat idle on the window-seat

in the parson's room, it was but natural that she should be thinking of him as she looked up to the sky, stretching away, all splendour, till it touched the sea.

The sun was not niggardly on this evening; it did not limit itself to the brightening of just one patch on the under side of Heaven. The whole stretch of it was golden, and glowing, and glorious, with jasper seas lapping on glistening sands.

And then the gold took a deeper tint—red-gold it was—rising in wonderful burnished cliffs and crags about wonderful purple seas. Magic seas of a magic land, stretching away and away, infinite, boundless—a land all silence and solitude, with never a voice or a wave to break the deep hush.

Then the cliffs and the crags were no longer red-gold; they were a flaming orange, stretching out into crimson waters—fiery seas on a fire-edged shore. The sun had set the magic world afire, and the glow of it touched everything.

Then slowly, very slowly, the fierceness grew more dim. As the moments passed the glow died out, the shores faded from their flame-tints to a tawny softness. The fiery seas lay out in tender amethyst, and a faint mist came before the eyes looking up from earth to that under side of Heaven.

Miss Ursula's dreamy gaze was fixed upon the sky

till all the glory had passed into greyness, and in the greyness a star or two ; then she drew her eyes to earth, and saw that night was falling. But as they rested on the horizon it seemed that the stars had fallen also—many stars, from the greyness above to the greyness below—and Miss Ursula's heart beat fast, and she held her breath ; and, at last, doubting her sight, she rubbed her lids, thinking the stars were pictured on her eyes. They were not stars when she looked again, the strange bright thing was closer now, and she could see that it was a ship—a wonderful little ship—sailing in from the horizon, edged with light, brilliant from stem to stern, gleaming from every point, with scores of lights shining from ropes, and sails, and masthead. Miss Ursula pressed her hands tightly together and murmured two words : “The prince ! the prince !” She said over and over again beneath her breath, “The prince ! the prince !” In her tumult of excitement she knelt upon the window-seat and leaned out of the casement to watch the lovely thing as it drew towards shore. Truly it was a ship from fairy-land ! At length the garden hedge shut it from her sight, and all was darkness from tamarisk bush to the horizon.

With a deep sigh of ecstasy she turned to the room ; that also was dark, for the parson had not come back

from his north transept. Then Miss Ursula felt that she could not speak of this strange, beautiful thing to any one, and she stole to her own little room, and lay there in her bed looking into the darkness with shining eyes. "The prince! the prince!" she whispered. But when at length she slept it was of Master Humphrey she dreamed.

When the sun rose next morning it seemed to be his will that Miss Ursula should rise also, for he shone in at her window with such a blaze that his glory entered the glory of her dreams, and the double brightness awoke her. Her thoughts flew, quick as shot arrows, to the wonderful ship which had shone out of the twilight. "And was that a dream, too?" she asked the sun, but she sprang from her bed without waiting for his reply, and looked across the metal-white water. What she saw lying there on the shining sea, just beyond the line of the tamarisk hedge, quickly sorted dream from truth. It was a ship — a little fairy ship—light, snowy-sailed, graceful, decked with flowers from stem to stern, with silken ribbons floating languidly from her masthead, and silken hangings about her deck.

Miss Ursula dressed quickly, with shaking fingers, but she looked for quite a long minute in her mirror when it was done, and hoped her soft, white frock

became her well. Then the demure little lady went softly down the stairs, and stepped as quietly out of the house as Agrimony had done when starting on her "errand of humanity" that morning in the springtime.

The prince was coming! It was as she had always known it would be. She was going towards him, and she felt him to be drawing nearer and nearer. Without a second thought or a backward glance she made her way to the edge of the cliff, where the path led down to Averack Cove, and then she stood and looked full upon the ship, and waited. It was very beautiful, that little fairy ship, outlined with flowers and hung with silk. She could see the lilies and roses that were wreathed about it, and fancied the scent of them was wafted up to her.

"Ursula!" She turned to the voice.

"Humphrey!" she cried. His eyes were shining, and a white rose was in his coat. She looked at him with puzzled eyes. "Humphrey!" she cried again, and pointed to the ship. "Look! the prince!"

But instead of looking seaward he looked into her eyes. "Ursula!" he said again, and then he held his arms to her.

And then, quite suddenly, she understood his heart and hers, and knew where fairyland lay.

. . . . .

"To live in this world one needs—not to speak of other virtues—discretion and a fine forgiveness."

As he finished speaking the parson turned from Agrimony, and waved his hands towards a sturdy figure mending a net upon Averack beach. The parson had been on his way to the village, Agrimony on her way home, when they met on the cliff hill and caught sight of the stooping figure below. Then the parson spoke, and waved his hand towards the beach, showing even more insight into human nature by the gesture than by the words. Then he went upon his way, and Agrimony stood very still where he had left her.

In a few minutes, however, instead of taking the Parsonage hill, she walked on by the cliff till she reached the pathway. Then she trod down it lightly and stood upon the beach.

"Fine mornin', 'Zekiel!" she called. He straightened his back as if her voice had touched a spring in it, then he dropped his net, as if to smile upon her he must, forsooth, have empty hands.

"Ha, Agrimony!" he answered, and he moved towards her.

"Don't 'ee drop your work," she commanded; "I wouldn't have any man alive turn his eyes from duty for the likes of me."

"You witch—you!" he exclaimed, and his eyes were glad.

"I'm a witch, right enough, this mornin'. I'm feelin'—well—like as if I could bring 'ee any mortal thing you was to choose to ask."

For a moment 'Zekiel was dumb—but eager withal.

"Well, poor human creature," she demanded in mock solemnity, "can 'ee tell me no desire of your heart?"

"Agrimony," he breathed quickly, "you know!"

For a moment she looked puzzled, feigning ignorance, then she laughed.

"I b'leeve I do," she said. Then her dancing eyes dropped quite shyly.

'Zekiel was ever a lad of action; he wasted no time; he just clipped her hands and kissed her.

When, after a rather prolonged pause, 'Zekiel gathered up his net there was a big tangle in it, and Agrimony laughed out at him, rippling her voice and bobbing her short, dark curls. At the sound of that laugh the happiness died from 'Zekiel's face, a sudden hunted look crept into his eyes, and he stood and gazed at her as if listening to some sound far away.

When, surprised at the silence which followed, Agrimony lifted her face from her hands and looked at her lover the look on his face startled her.



"You've—a-laughed that way—before," he said slowly at last, and he knitted his brows. Then suddenly the blood rushed to his face. "'Twas a dream—an'—an'," he pointed to the desolate beach, "there was a ship—a maid!" Then his voice became a cry. "No; 'twasn' no dream! Agrimony, Agrimony! Is it this as is the dream?—all a dream—naught but a dream?"

"No, no, dear heart!" she cried, throwing her firm arms round about his neck, and laughing up into his pain-stricken eyes. "That was the dream; you was ill, an' wanderin'. This is what's real!" And she drew his cheek to hers.

"I was—ill—an' wanderin'," he repeated dazedly, "ill—an' wanderin'." Then he drew a long, deep breath. "This is what's real," he echoed slowly, and he held the reality close to his heart, then smiled and kissed her with a gratitude which was almost solemn.

And the storms beat on, and the sun still shone upon Landecarroch and its folks. At Pensallas Mistress Ursula Harle poured her China tea-drink from a massive silver pot into teacups of less childish size than those she had been wont to use at the old Parsonage, and her dainty frocks and hooded cloaks were made of

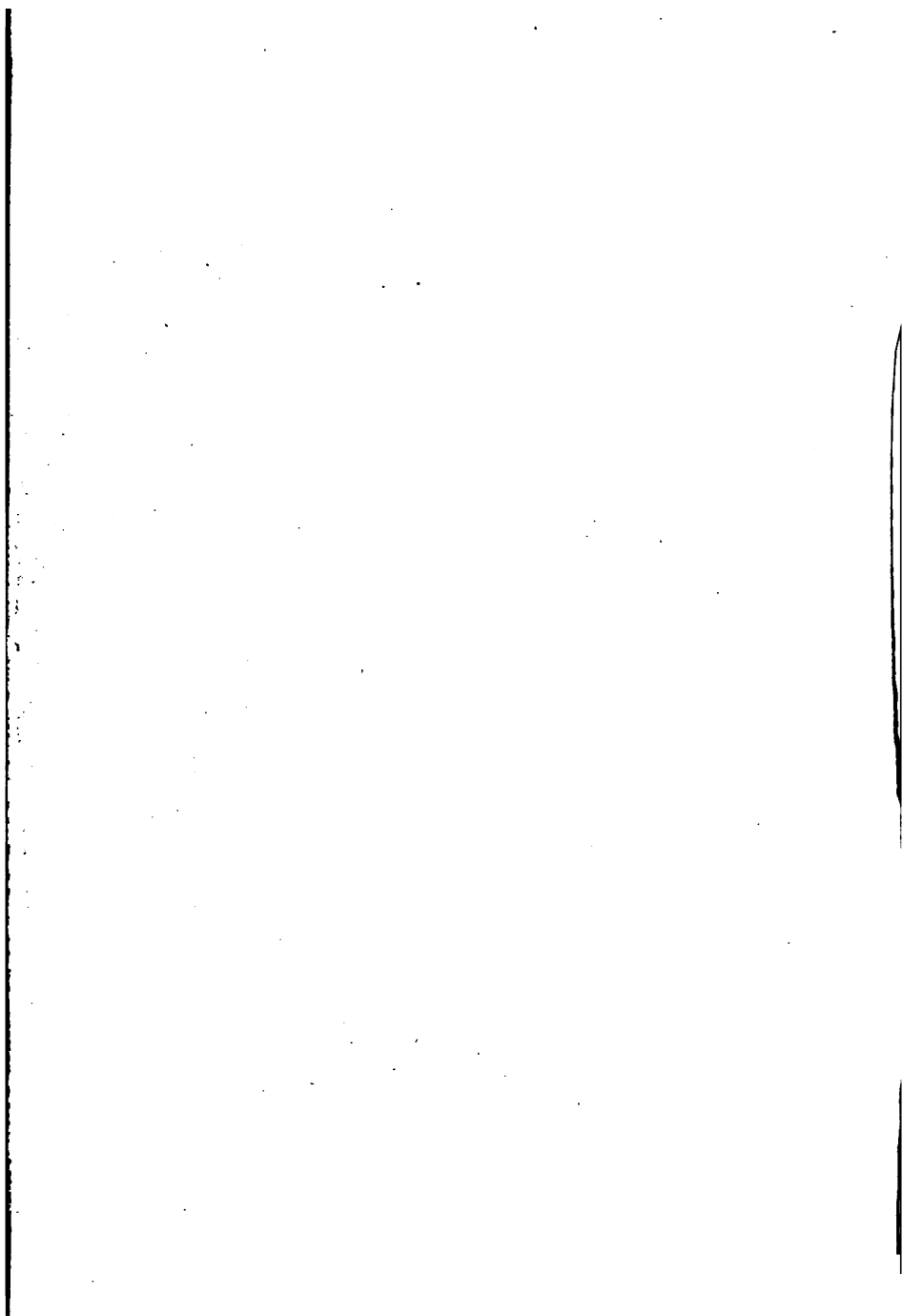
richer stuffs, but her pretty ways did not change with her name, and Dame Tellam beamed approval.

In the coastguard's cottage Mary Ludgven's face was calm as she bent over her second son, and her smiles were placid as she looked upon 'Zekiel's wife. In the churchyard, too, the graves grew green with time and the number of them increased but slowly. Landecarroch was striving to forget the time of its visitation. Only now and again when a villager grew garrulous in Peter Ludgven's hearing, and told of those months, and framed the name "Teresa," the good creature would knit his brow and plead: "I'd as lief you didn' name it, my dear soul. I'd as lief you let the matter 'bide."

And so it passed.

But Sam'le Laskey did not forget. To him it was as yesterday that the blazing-eyed witch had come close to his home and tortured him; and he hated her; and day after day he stood upon Averack beach and cursed her with his impotent tongue, and hurled pebbles into the sea, climbing back up the path to the churchyard when he had done it, to lay his mouth to the turf and whisper of his work.







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